



SPIRIT-OF-IRON

HARWOOD STEELE





SPIRIT-OF-IRON

(*Manitou-pewabic*)

AN AUTHENTIC NOVEL OF
THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE

BY
HARWOOD STEELE

AUTHOR OF "CLEARED FOR ACTION," "THE
CANADIANS IN FRANCE, 1915-1918," ETC.

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TO
THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE
“ORIGINALS” OF 1874,
THE ADVANCE SCOUTS OF THE ARMY OF
WESTERN CANADIAN CIVILIZATION

FOREWORD

“Spirit-of-Iron” is an attempt to present fact in the form of romantic fiction. It portrays the development of North-Western Canada in the pioneer period, the main events of which, with one or two exceptions, have been closely followed.

The characters are types. Hector Adair is intended to represent the ideal Mounted Police officer in particular and the ideal British officer generally. He is not to be identified with any historical figure connected with the Force. The plan, here employed, of symbolizing and tracing the development of a country through the development of an individual such as Hector is, I think, new. The politician, Welland, similarly, is a type, and has no definite connection with any famous politician of real life. The men of the Police—the Marquis, Sergeant Kellett and others—are also types, true to the extraordinary calibre of the Force. The remaining characters—whom the reader may identify if—and as—he chooses, all had their originals in the old Canadian North-West.

Practically every incident and episode of the story had its origin in fact. The arrest of Wild Horse, the Whitewash Bill man-hunt, the holding of Hopeful Pass and innumerable minor incidents all occurred, though not necessarily in the circumstances described, while the details of the dangerous plot confronting Hector in Book IV are drawn, almost line for line, from a great if obscure page in the more recent history of the Mounted Police in the North. Hector’s long struggle with Welland is not based on any particular conflict of this kind in real life, but that such things occur, in Canada as elsewhere, any man acquainted with the Services and politics can vouch for. Finally, the locale of each episode is not necessarily to be identified with any particular point in our North-West.

The word "Royal" is everywhere omitted from the title of the Force because the honorary distinction of "Royal" was not theirs when the events covered in this novel took place.

I have described the book as "An Authentic Novel of the North-West Mounted Police" because I wish to emphasize that it endeavours to present the Force as it was and is and not as portrayed by well-meaning but ignorant writers of the "red love, two-gun" variety, and it is my hope that, through this book, the reader may obtain a clearer conception of the marvellous devotion to duty, the high idealism, the splendid efficiency which have made the Mounted Police famous than any to be derived from these inaccurate romances.

HARWOOD STEELE.

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BOOK ONE: *On the Anvil*

BOOK ONE: *On the Anvil*

Chapter I

i

The time had come for the North-West Mounted Police to say goodbye to Lower Fort Garry, the home of the Force since its inception some months before.

In the clear spring dawn, the scarlet-coated column fell in, ranging behind it a long tail of ox-carts and wagons. Sergeant-Major Whittaker, of 'J' Division, a straight-backed, dapper, sinewy little man with a pair of fierce moustaches, called the roll. The Regimental Sergeant-Major, trotting over to the bearded Assistant-Commissioner, reported all ready to march. Orders cracked down the line. With a shout, a thunder of hoofs and the roll of heavy wheels, the cavalcade surged into motion.

In the rear of the column rode Constable Hector Adair.

II

A fine, big, handsome fellow, Hector, a splendid specimen of what the Province of Ontario could produce when it tried, and looking every inch what he was—the son of a hardy soldier-father, that Colonel Adair who had been one of the pioneers of old Blenheim County, at home, and who, before that, had served under the Iron Duke himself in the Peninsula and at Waterloo. This young giant's broad shoulders and deep chest would have been the envy of many heavy dragoons, and he was six feet tall. His face, bronzed, with straight nose, strong chin, firm mouth and steel-grey eyes, had in it a great power and yet an idealism unspoilt by contact with the rotten side of Life. Men—a keen

observer felt—though knowing him still a boy—he was actually twenty—would regard him as a man, fear him intensely and follow him anywhere. Women would thrill at his physique, linger over his brown hair, know him a man, regard him as a boy and love him with a love largely maternal.

More than this, he looked the soldier-born. No finer school for the making of men ever existed than the old, partially developed Upper Canada where Hector had first seen the light and spent his childhood. It had been rough, crude and half civilized but also vigorous and strong. Its immense forests, its rapid streams, its solitudes possessed by dangerous wild animals, had given him resource, self-reliance, endurance, courage. The most ordinary affairs of life—a visit to the nearest settlement, the routine journey to church or school—tested the quality of many a grown man. The barest necessities were won only by the hardest of hard work. Even the pastimes of the district round about demanded much pluck and stamina. Blue blood went without luxuries and handled axe or plough. Men were men there, boys were men in miniature, and women were worthy of their sons and husbands—more could not be said in praise of them. Altogether, the natural environment which had been Hector's as a boy could not help but develop in him the first requisite of the born soldier—true manhood. And the sports to be enjoyed in Blenheim county—shooting, fishing, big game hunting in the heart of the great wildernesses—had made him a giant at last, with a heart that nothing shook and no nerves whatever.

If all this were not enough, Hector's boyhood associates had been of a character which must inevitably have shaped him into what he was. Take the Colonel, who, coming out to Canada to occupy land under one of the earliest settlement schemes, had built up prosperity for himself and constructed Silvercrest, his fine estate, from the trackless wild. The Colonel, from the first, had intended that his son should have a Commission in the Army and carry on the fighting traditions of a martial family. He believed, besides, in King Solomon's adage concerning the rod and

the spoiled child, considered that boys should be seldom seen and never heard and held other ideas equally as uncomfortable.

The Colonel had not been able to spare much time to Hector, but, such as it was, it was well spent. He had not only thrashed him when he needed it, but had educated him. Knowing that the little country school could give his son only a rudimentary education, he expended an hour or so a day in teaching Hector many things in literature, geography, history and mathematics—particularly literature. By great effort, labouriously bringing many of the books all the way from England, the Colonel had formed a fine library at Silvercrest. The old classics were there, with later and contemporary writers—Scott, Coleridge, Dickens and Alfred Tennyson, the handsome lion of the Old Land. Father and son had toiled most studiously over these treasures and it was worth something to see the small, brown-haired boy struggling with the heroes of Greece under the stern eye of his white-haired parent. Hector had the run of the room and on rainy days all the giants of romance and chivalry took full possession of that book-lined haven in the wilderness. Such passages as this rang like far trumpets in his ears:

*I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King as if he were
Their conscience and their conscience as their King;
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her
And worship her by years of noble deeds
Until they won her. . . .*

These stirring lines, from the beginning, had filled him with strange longings and given him a great ideal.

Besides these more general things, much of the Colonel's

teaching had been devoted to building up the boy into that splendid product, 'an officer and a gentleman.'

Then there was his mother—a sweet, gentle, dainty woman, of marvellous housekeeping ability. From her, Hector had learned such of those fine, old-fashioned principles as the Colonel had been too busy to teach. Hector's little sister, Nora—his constant companion in his boyhood doings, rendering him profound homage and devotion and regarding him as a demigod, the mover of mountains, the achiever of impossibilities—had done much to make him chivalrous. His cousins Hugh and Allen, boys of his own age who lived close by, could not be said to have much influenced him, except to make him one of the most reckless lads and finest sportsmen in the county, though from his older cousin, John, he had learnt all he knew of woodcraft and athletics.

But the men on his father's farm had done more to make a soldier out of Hector than even the Colonel. They were all veterans of many campaigns, or at least members of the local militia—none but these were granted work at Silvercrest. Grey old, lean old Sergeant Pierce, the Colonel's right-hand man, had marched with the 28th, the Colonel's own Regiment, from Torres Vedras to the Pyrenees. Corporal Hardwick, late of the 95th, had served in the Kaffir Wars and accompanied the 'Green Jackets' in the attack on the Sevastapol Ovens. Private Toombs had aided the 57th—the famous 'Die-hards'—in suppressing the 'Sepoy Rebellion.' 'Maintop' MacEachern, senior naval representative, a lean, white-whiskered old sea-dog, had been a powder-monkey under Broke when the *Shannon* took the *Chesapeake*. And 'Long Dick' Masters, the 'daddy' of the whole crowd, barring Sergeant Pierce, and so tall that he could give even the Sergeant a couple of inches, had long ago led the rush of the York Volunteers at Queenston Heights.

The influence of such men on a youngster's development was inevitably potent. Thanks to them, Silvercrest had overflowed with Service tradition. As a small boy, Hector had been allowed to form them into a little company, which, under the Sergeant's supervision, he drilled with unflagging zeal, until he was as efficient as the smartest instructor in

the smartest regiment of the Guards. They told him yarns of a hundred fights and fields. They sang him marvellous choruses—'Ranzo,' 'We'll Fight the Greeks and Romans on the High Seas-O,' 'The Bold Soldier Boy' and many others—which in their day had startled the French outposts in Spain or enlivened the fo'c's'le of the *Victory*. They gave him such formulæ as this, which he had from Sergeant Pierce: 'Don't knuckle down to a bully. Don't start the trouble but take on anything that breathes if there's good reason. Stand up to your man like a soldier, even if you know you're licked, and fight—d'you see, little master?—till the last shot's fired.' And, between them, they drove him wild to serve the Queen.

No wonder, then, that he rode out today in the midst of the Mounted Police.

But why was he only a ranker—when the Colonel, from the first, had trained him for a Commission?

Of this—a word later.

III

So the years of Hector's boyhood had been passed in an atmosphere of idealistic tradition.

His first attempt at soldiering in earnest was made when he was twelve years old—with the Fenian raids on the Niagara Peninsula.

The Blenheim Rangers, one of Upper Canada's finest militia regiments, being called out on this occasion to defend the frontier, Hector yearned to march away with them. He thought, poor youngster, that he might be allowed to serve as a bugler or a drummer, for he was big and strong for his age. Born, as Maintop put it, with a sword in his hand and epaulettes on his shoulders, accustomed all his life to hear of 'sallies and retires, of trenches, tents' and such matters, his daily course shaped with the idea that he was eventually to have a Commission, this was only natural. The Colonel, equally naturally, refused point-blank to let him go. And—again of course—Hector took the law into his own hands and ran away.

All was confusion and anxiety at Silvercrest during the

following three days and a hue and cry sought Hector over half Upper Canada. When eventually he was brought back, a dishevelled, unhappy little figure, the Colonel found he had not the heart to punish him as he deserved. He could only gently reprove him and promise that, in any future emergency, provided the authorities would have him, he would be allowed to go.

Though Hector's share in the repulse of the Fenian raids was thus brought to nought, the attempt had at least shown that the spirit of soldiering was strong within him.

The Colonel's promise was tested and Hector's second opportunity came with the expedition sent to crush the rebellion on the Red River. The boy was then sixteen and already of fine physique. John, who had a Commission in one of the regiments, requested and, to Hector's rapture, received permission to enlist him in his company. But again Fate stepped in, cruelly. Hector got as far as Toronto, where the expedition was assembling, when a telegram recalled him. His adored little sister, Nora, always delicate, was dying of pneumonia caught in a summer storm. Hector reached home in time to hold her dead body in his arms. He was heart-broken. Grown pale and stooped and haggard in a night, his father made him a piteous appeal.

"Hector," he had said, "I want you to give up this idea of going to Fort Garry. It would have been different had—had Nora lived. But your mother needs you now. She can't lose her two babies at once. Everything can be arranged. My friends in the Rifles will give you your discharge. I hate to disappoint you a second time, boy. I'm asking you to make a big sacrifice."

And Hector—with a great effort of real courage—had answered quietly,

"Of course, in that case, sir—I'll not go."

So he moved a step nearer true manhood.

IV

At Toronto, while waiting to go to Red River, Hector had a strange experience—an isolated thing, as incongruous

as a wreath of flowers in the mouth of a cannon. He had not, at that time, the perception to realize that it was the first shadow of things to come, sent to open his eyes to his dawning power.

One evening, walking by himself, he struck up an acquaintance with a young fellow named George Harris. Afterwards, they saw each other frequently. Hector enjoyed George's company, because he was refreshingly unlike any other boy he had ever met, an amazing complexity, made up of many extremes. He had odd fits of melancholy, when he said nothing, alternating with bursts of liveliness, when he chattered away for hours on any subject. Though he neither smoked nor drank, he could swear with marvellous fluency—like a schoolboy in the role of man-about-town. Possessed of an extraordinary eye for a well-dressed woman or a handsome man, he yet hated Hector to look at either. He had rooms in town, but persistently refused to ask Hector into them. No persuasion would induce him to go out except at night. Altogether, he was a curious fellow.

Then came the revelation. The childish side of George's character showed itself one evening in enthusiastic declarations that he wished he was a soldier. Hector agreed it was a fine life. That fairly launched George. Real soldiering did not appeal to him. It was the glamour of display—the great reviews, the bands, the gleaming scarlet.

Quite carried away, he halted in the street, clasped his hands and exclaimed ecstatically:

“Oh, I love to hear the jingling of the spurs!”

Instantly Hector's suspicions, till then stupidly dormant, had flamed up. He glanced around the dark street. No-one was in sight. They were in the bright glow of a lamp.

Sending George's hat spinning, he caught him by the wrists in a fierce grip. And—a mass of fair hair came tumbling down the captive's shoulders—a pretty face, distorted with alarm, sprang into view—

A girl! All the moods and caprices were instantly explained. A girl!

Hector's heart beat furiously. He held her tight.

"Let me go!" she gasped, struggling. "You're hurting me. We'll be seen! Let me go!"

Hector flamed into frightened rage—he was very young and knew nothing of women.

"Who are you?" he panted. "What do you mean by it? Supposing we'd been caught like this? You fool—you fool!—"

"Let me go!" she begged.

"Answer me, will you?" he stormed.

Realizing that this was a woman several years older than himself, he became suddenly conscious of his helplessness in her hands and felt something not far from terror seize him.

"What am I to think of you?"

"Shut up!" White, with agonized tears in her eyes, she looked defiantly into his face. "I won't have you talk to me like this. Oh, I know I've run the risk of ruining myself and hurting you, but I don't care—no, I don't! I'm just as straight as—as—" She mastered herself with an effort. "Listen! Do you think I'd have dressed myself up like this otherwise? Gone to all this trouble? And taken these chances? And kept you out of my rooms? You bet I wouldn't! I'd have dressed myself up to kill and stopped you on the street. But a—a straight girl can't do that! So I had to do this. It was the only way. Oh, can't you see?"

"Had to! The only way!"

Bitter scorn lashed her.

"Yes, it was," she said. Suddenly she dropped her voice and turned her face to his. "I saw you out walking several times. I had to know you. Hector, *don't* you understand?"

He was dazed. He clung to her wrists.

"You fool—" she went on, with a strange little laugh. "*You* are the fool, funny, silly boy! Don't you see—I'm mad about you, Hector?"

This frightened him more than ever.

"The devil you are!" he ground out. "Who *are* you, anyway? What am I going to do to you?"

Desperately humiliated, she fought to escape. He held her strongly. She gasped and prayed for release but he would not listen.

"Hector," she had implored, at last, "if you're a gentleman—if you've any sense of chivalry—!"

Any sense of chivalry? She had struck the right note.

He let her go—watched her run away until the night swallowed her. Then, in a sort of stupour, he picked up his swagger stick and walked back to his quarters. . . .

Nothing in his experience, before or since, had so closely resembled a 'love affair.'

v

Strangely enough, it was to his father's death that Hector eventually owed his opportunity to achieve the life for which he had been trained since birth—life in the service of the Queen; and the realization of his boyhood dreams of chivalry.

To this, too, he owed the fact that, when eventually he donned the scarlet tunic, that tunic was, not the gold-laced vestment of an officer, but the plain coat of a ranker, in the Mounted Police.

The status under which he entered the Service was a heavy disappointment. His early enlistments in the militia or the Rifles for the Red River had been merely preliminary canters regarded at the time as useful training for the future Commission. Hector was not ashamed of his ranker's uniform. He knew the true worth of the man who carries the rifle and pack. Though the sword points the way, the bayonet must follow—or there can be no victory. But the high heart aspires to the sword rather than the bayonet. It is not always easy to follow. It is always difficult to lead. He wished to lead—had been trained and moulded for leadership. To have to relinquish leadership or give up the Service altogether had been a terrible blow to him—how terrible only those who come of Service blood and have lived for years in a Service atmosphere can really appreciate.

For to such as these—to such as Hector—the Army is no machine, no hide-bound association of slaves marching in the lockstep of brutal discipline; nor is it a great dramatic society devoted to meaningless ritual and pompous display. At its worst, it is not the raving monster of ignorant fancy,

revelling in sacrifice and blood. But it is something so wonderful that no pen on earth can picture it. It is a glorious brotherhood, a religion giving and demanding much of its votaries—demanding dauntless devotion, iron endurance, inflexible loyalty to God, King, division, battalion—giving the knowledge of work well done and petty selfishness voluntarily set aside for the good of the common cause. To such as these there is marvellous music in the wild voice of the bugle—hallowed by sacred memories and age-old traditions—and the majestic dignity and power in the mere sight of a brigade presenting arms will bring a lump to their throats, while the Colours, tattered, stained with the blood of heroes, emblazoned with the names of great victories, have about them something almost divine. They have one mistress—these Service men—one mother, one sister, whose honour is in their hands and for whom they will die without a murmur. She watches them, rewards them, punishes them, loves them, guards them, from the ‘Reveillé’ of their first morning to the ‘Last Post’ and three rounds blank of the last night of all. She is fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners. They call her The Regiment.

A place in this great brotherhood belongs to every soldier. But the officer is the High Priest of the order. It is for him to guide and encourage his men, to rally the broken line, halt the retreat, give fresh life to the failing charge and gather the spears into his breast to make a place for them to follow. Rob a boy trained for leadership of his birthright and he loses everything he considers worth while. Cut him off from The Regiment and—break his heart.

The Colonel had succumbed to a stroke. His fatal illness had not come suddenly. From the day of Nora’s death, it had begun. Nora seemed to have taken away the Colonel’s vigour with her. But the decline was not solely on her account. For years, though Hector had not known it till too late, the Colonel had laboured under a heavy financial burden—notes endorsed—bad harvests—family honour—the old, old story.

To this state of affairs, above everything, the change of

plans for Hector's future had been due. The old gentleman had torn his heart out when he told his son that he must give up the idea of a Regular Commission or even of enlisting because it had become his duty to go into business and redeem the family fortune.

The hideous truth had revealed itself by slow degrees after the Colonel's death, when it was seen that practically nothing was left for Hector and his mother, that Silvercrest and everything in it must go, that Hector would have to get some kind of work at once and that Mrs. Adair must transfer herself to John's, for the time at least.

Came into Hector's hands, at this crisis, a clipping, like the blast of a trumpet sounding specially for him.

'Recruiting for New Police Force Commences,' said the headlines of the clipping. 'Officers in City.'

There followed a description of the measures which were about to enforce the new North-West Mounted Police Act. It seemed that three hundred men 'who should be mounted as the Government should from time to time direct,' were being assembled for duty as military constabulary in the North-West Territories. 'No person shall be appointed to the Police Force unless he be of sound constitution, active and able-bodied, able to ride, of good character, able to read and write either the English or French language and between the ages of 18 and 40 years.' This extract had shown Hector that he could easily qualify.

The clipping came from a Toronto paper and was dated August, 1873.

Here was his chance. It was 'now or never.' Fate or Destiny had placed that item in his hands, for a purpose, and that purpose must be fulfilled. Then and there, Hector had resolved to accept the chance. . . .

There was in the dining-room at Silvercrest, carved in stone above the fireplace, a crest and motto, the coat-of-arms of the Colonel's branch of the Adair family. Hector, in the old days, had eagerly gained from his father a full knowledge of the meaning of every device and had even become capable, in time, of reciting every syllable of the heraldic language describing the coat-of-arms. This had been placed

upon the shield to commemorate the gallantry of an Adair at Bannockburn; that to symbolize the endurance of another at Sluys. The history of the family was written in the design. And it bore not one vestige of dishonour.

"Remember, Hector," the Colonel had often said fiercely, "the shield is *clean*. Mind you keep it so!"

Beneath the *clean* shield was the motto, consisting of two words only, but in these words also might be read the story of a mighty line:

'Strong.—Steadfast.'

All that 'Strong' can mean, all that 'Steadfast' can imply, the Adairs had always been. Woe betide the luckless wight who should be the first to deviate from it!

'Strong! Steadfast!'

Strong and steadfast Hector would have to be if he was to maintain the honour of the Adairs in the times before him. His feet were on the sunset trail. At its end was Life, swift and fierce and terrible. Years and years of battling through wild winters and blazing summers, on barren mountains, lifeless prairies, and death-dominated rivers lay before him and in that Western land the hands of many men—merciless Indians, murderous horse-thieves, gamblers, whiskey-traders and desperadoes—would be against him—against him and his comrades of the Police. He knew it. He knew that the Force would be but a handful scattered over a vast wilderness which it must protect and eventually free from the domination of innumerable enemies. He knew the greatness of the task to be achieved before the Flag could wave in security from sea to sea. Here was a wonderful opportunity, a real fight to win, a splendid objective. It should have frightened him. Instead he welcomed it. He was as fitted for the work before him as any man could be.

'Strong. Steadfast.'

Chapter II

I

At Winnipeg, straggling its hundred-odd houses, its dozen stores, its sturdy churches and its garish saloons along the muddy trail, the column found the entire population awaiting them. During the winter the Police had made many staunch friends. There were cheery greetings enough and to spare for Hector as he rode along with his comrades through the little crowd. Here was a shout and a wave from Big Jim Hackett, owner of the *Hell's Gate* saloon, there a smiling blush from pretty Miss Sinclair, one of the local lights, which drew upon him a volley of chaff. Stout, grizzled, jovial and 'unco' canny' Andrew Ferguson, the village baker, received him with a round of Gaelic and a burst of Cree which betrayed his parentage. Johnny Oakdale, the little hardware man with whom Hector had become pleasantly intimate when they erected stoves at the lower fort months before, gave him a shake of the hand which was worth a dozen noisier welcomes.

Now that the hour when he must part with these great-hearted friends was actually upon him, Hector found himself stirred with regret. Recalling happy times, he almost wished that he could remain in the settlement forever or, better still, take the entire population into the North-West with him.

II

Arriving at Dufferin, they joined in preparing for their tremendous march. The Commissioner and the rest of the Force came into camp, bringing more horses and wagons and an army of agricultural implements—they would be dependent entirely on themselves for food in the country

to which they were going. A marvellous atmosphere took possession of the camp. The crews of the *Golden Hind*, the *Santa Maria* and the *Nonsuch*, which carried Drake and Columbus and the first officers of the Hudson's Bay Company into the new and unknown world, must have felt just such an atmosphere as they got ready for sea. La Verandrye, Champlain, La Salle were close kin to the men of the Mounted Police assembling at Dufferin.

Languid June drifted into the sunny splendors of July and the white-helmeted, red-coated little column began its march Westward.

To establish posts through that great wilderness, now tenanted only by a few white settlers, Hudson's Bay traders and other traders who dealt in poison-whiskey with nomadic bands of Indians; and from these posts to enforce over every yard of that immensity the laws of Canada—that was their task. They played the dual role of soldier-pioneers.

But they were soldiers and soldiers only in the routine that governed them in camp and on the march. From dawn to dusk, each day slipped easily by. The advance led them over mile on mile of wind-swept prairie blazing with wild flowers, trilling with the songs of birds and insects, dappled with sun and shadow, sweetly perfumed, a hundred tales of hoof and claw on its broad surface and the cloudless sky above. Sunset, when the tired teams halted, the tents sprang up, the wagons marshalled themselves into line abreast, the scouts and guards came loping in and the smoke of cooking fires arose—sunset, when the glories of the Kingdom of Heaven flamed for a moment in the dusk, was an hour of splendor. Then, after supper, the older officers told them strange stories, they sang choruses to the accompaniment of mouth-organ, concertina or violin, and the happy half-breed drivers danced the Red River jig on a special door they carried in the carts. Coffee followed and a general departure to the tents; more laughing as all hands settled down for the night; and so they came to the last bugle-call of a day punctuated by bugle-calls, 'Lights Out' quivered dolefully through the lines, the orange cones of glowing canvas vanished one by one and the deep silence

of night in vast spaces, broken only by the occasional stamping of restless horses, descended on the camp, leaving the sentries to watch the stars alone.

There was plenty of hard work and much discomfort, rising towards the end, for some of them, to real hardship. But they were young and as keen and vigorous as steel blades. They cheerfully stood it all.

Hector preferred duty with the advance-guard or scouts to anything else. There was much more to see and do there, and courage, strength and intense vigilance were essential. Many useful lessons were to be learned in front and, above all, the teacher was the finest scout, the wisest plainsman, the surest horseman in the column, old in Indian fighting, versed in all the legends of the country, knowing the Indians as a mother knows her children and the prairies as a postman knows his beat. Though usually silent and distant, this giant seemed to take a fancy to Hector and unbent to him always. After a time they made a custom of riding together. He was guide and interpreter; a quarter breed; and Martin Brent his name.

Old Martin told Hector everything he knew, and started him fairly off towards being one of the best men in the Force.

As they moved forward, week by week, through sun and storm, intense heat, dead calm, cold rain and blustering wind, the country changed. The wide levels of plain dotted with small bushes became little ridges, sharp bluffs and rounded hills. Then a maze of rivers appeared before them, running in all directions but Martin led them unerringly through. Next came a bolder roll of prairie, with wider valleys and steeper, larger crests, sweeping on again to blend with the confused jumble of foot-hills which fringe the Rocky Mountains. The Commissioner at last turned back Eastward. The Assistant-Commissioner pushed on, Hector's division with him. Indians hovered restlessly on their flanks and came to visit them with tokens of friendship. Not a shot was fired against them. Once they passed through immense herds of buffalo, covering the plains for miles like a restless sea, the rear-guard of a tribe fast dis-

appearing. At last the long-expected mountains rose in the Assistant-Commissioner's path, marking the limits of their journey, a line of blanketed chiefs, a ridge of wintry sea hurling silvery crests against long palisades of angry sunset.

Here they halted and prepared to build their barracks, the great trek ended.

A thousand miles, or little less, had been covered since they left Dufferin. In their trail blossomed flowers of law and order. The wilderness became a Land of Promise as they passed. Today the iron road, laden with the traffic of a continent, gleams where their wagons rolled. Prosperous farms rise everywhere on the expanse which to them was only an Indian hunting-ground. Young towns stand where they pitched their lonely tents. Proud cities blaze and thunder where they built their lonely forts and in peace and ease a People reap the harvest sown by them in peril and privation.

III

Before winter took full command the barracks were built—rough cabins, enclosed in a stockade—and the Flag hoisted. They christened the place Fort Macleod, in honour of their chief.

In the meantime, callers came and left their cards, came from everywhere—white men and Indians—but especially Indians. One of the first visitors was Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfoot Nation, who rode in with his fellow-chiefs of the Bloods and Piegiens, a Prince of the Plains surrounded by his Court. They were tall, straight, fearless men, well armed, dressed in buffalo-robcs or gay blankets, richly beaded moccasins and leggings, brass rings round their neat black braids, feathers in their hair. Martin began the pow-wow by presenting them to the Assistant-Commissioner. Then they squatted in a semi-circle before him and passed around the pipe of peace.

When the Colonel had explained the why and wherefore of the Force and Martin had interpreted, his long hair thrown back, his eyes blazing, the chiefs stood up in turn

and gave thanks. They told of the devastating fire-water, of women carried away, of robes and horses stolen, of pillage and butchery endured at the hands of beastly white men. They showed themselves facing starvation through the wanton destruction of the buffalo. But now, they said, those days were past.

"Before you came, we crept in terror of our lives," said The Gopher, "Today we walk erect and are men."

Most eloquent of all was Crowfoot himself.

"Hear me," he began, "for I speak for every man, woman and child of the Blackfoot Nation." Then, baring his arm and with proud gestures, he went on. "I thank the Great White Mother and the One Above who rules us all because they have sent to us the Shagalasha, the red-coats, to save us from the bad white man and from ourselves. The Shagalasha are our friends. When we see them we lower our rifles and show them the open hand. What you have said is good and what you say shall be the law. I have spoken."

Hector, hearing these words interpreted, remembered how they had marched unchallenged through thousands of Indians, looked at his scarlet coat and, with a strange thrill of pride, understood.

Other visitors came to Fort Macleod in those early days—white men—spies sent by the whiskey-traders, curious American horsemen, and a few settlers, who thanked God, as Crowfoot had done, for sending the Police to deliver them from the drunken Indian and the low-down white. Of the settlers, none was so thankful, none became so popular in the course of a few calls, as Joe Welland, who lived on a homestead of sorts some sixty miles to the south, on St. Mary's River.

A keen-faced, clean-shaven, strong-handed man was Welland, tawny-haired, lean, sinewy as a broncho and as hard. He came in one day from what he called his 'ranch,' riding a fast mustang which he handled as easily as an expert dancer handles his partner on a ball-room floor. First he called on the Assistant-Commissioner, hat in hand, showing him the respect which was his due and telling him that the arrival of the Police was something for which he had prayed

ever since he first came West. Thence he went to see 'the boys,' who received him cordially and consented to smoke some excellent cigars which, somehow, even in that wilderness, he could offer them. He revealed a quiet, congenial manner and wits which were as sharp as needles.

His antecedents, such as they were, were satisfactory, representing all his respectable neighbours knew of him, which was not much. From them the boys learned: First, that Welland was well educated; second, had been born in North America, none knew exactly where; third, had lived in the country at least ten years; fourth, was of unimpeachable character; fifth, seemed apparently well off; sixth, was one of the 'lives' men in the Canadian North-West; seventh, like most of his fellows, was a squaw-man.

"You'll like Welland," said the honest traders. "He's dead against the whiskey-men. And he'll surely help to make things lively!"

IV

A short time before Christmas Welland met and halted Hector on the trail outside the fort.

"We're going to have as real a Christmas here as you can get in this God-forsaken country, Hector," he announced. "The officers and men will chip in a day's pay. The store-keepers will help us out and we'll form a citizens' committee. We're going to have a dance and dinner and ask every decent man and woman we can lay our hands on. The Old Man's consented, but it's a secret so far. So mum's the word."

"That's fine, Joe," said Hector—there had grown up quite an intimacy between them. "Who started the idea? First I've heard of it."

"S-s-h!" replied Welland, twinkling. "Not a word, boy. I—I started it myself. You see, I thought this-ud be a lonely Christmas for you young fellows, the first in a strange land, and we'd better help to make it a merry one. A sort of combined affair, it'll be, d'you see—welcome on our part, house-warming on yours."

"Good of you, Joe," Hector asserted.

"Bosh! Another thing—I'm going to suggest you for your committee."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Hector. "Don't do that, Joe."

"Why not?" asked Welland, smiling a little.

"Well—you see—first of all—I—the boys might think I'd put you up to it. They know we're friendly. Second, I don't want to push myself. If they want to elect me, let them do it on their own. Besides, I don't know anything about these things."

Welland set out to crush this youthful modesty.

"Now, look, Hec'. This will be done quiet and nice and proper. There won't be any harming you in the eyes of the boys. I'll just tip Sergeant-Major Whittaker that I want you on the committee because I think you're one of the most suitable men they can elect. He'll put you forward—he thinks as I do—and then you'll get a place. You're a gentleman born. You've seen how parties should be run—yes, you have!—and you're popular. Young? Hang it, boy! What does your age matter? There's not a more manly or popular character in the whole Force. Come, Hec', to oblige me! Well, I don't care whether you like it or not—you're going on this committee!"

With that he rode away.

Hector hated this favouritism but was none the less flattered. Welland, it seemed, had taken a fancy to him at the first meeting—had apparently singled him out from the ruck. And now this remarkable demonstration of the man's esteem had come. Welland was one of the best friends of the Force in the country. To be singled out for his favours was a high compliment. But Hector didn't *want* to be on the committee!

A few days later, at Sergeant-Major Whittaker's instigation, he found himself elected. Preparations commenced. Welland was mainly responsible for their success.

Welland it was who acted as the link between the Police and the civilians, advised the Assistant-Commissioner on a hundred points and, though he modestly refused a place on the committee himself, did more than any other man

to help the thing forward. He won the co-operation of the grouchiest store-keepers; solved the difficulty of obtaining enough flags to decorate the ball-room by having them manufactured at Fort Benton, in Montana, the nearest town; soothed all disunity among the members of the citizens' committee with a quiet word here, a story there; and oiled all the wheels of the preliminaries with a master-hand.

And, when the festivities had actually started, Welland was always at hand. If a guest became unruly, he brought him to his senses without disturbing for one moment the smooth tide of convivial joy. If the fiddlers got drunk before the dance, Welland had them in their places, tuning up, as fresh as daisies, when the hour for music came. To crown it all, he was so self-effacing that he might have been a helpful unseen spirit rather than a man.

As for Hector, the Colonel afterwards congratulated him on the part he had played in the arrangements.

"I owe this to Welland," Hector thought, a sentiment which would have greatly pleased that honest gentleman, as it happened to be true.

Chapter III

I

But there was more work than play for the Police in those early days, when they were striking at the roots of disorder.

The most powerful of their foes was the whiskey-trader. To the extermination of the whiskey-trader they directed a special campaign. Hardly a day went by through all the winter which did not see an expedition starting out to raid some distant outfit or returning with prisoners and spoil. A long ride through solitary darkness, a careful bit of scouting to surround the blissfully ignorant camp, a sudden swoop at dawn with levelled carbines and sometimes with a flurry of resistance; the guilty parties taken, the robes and liquor confiscated—thus went the programme. Courage, endurance, cunning, endless patience were all required to win success in the great game and no man employed on a whiskey raid could claim that his talents were wasted.

‘Red-hot’ Dan was operator, single-handed, of a den near the boundary-line. He was also a desperate character.

But no law-breaker, however desperate, could go unchallenged now. The Police must deal with him as with all. An exception, however, was made to this extent: the party was picked unusually carefully.

Sergeant-Major Whittaker led it. Martin Brent went with him as scout and guide. The three others were Constable Cranbrook; Constable Bland, the finest marksman in the Force; and Constable Adair.

The trumpeter was sounding ‘Reveillé’ as they left Fort Macleod and turned their horses southward.

At dusk they reached Joe Welland’s shack, where they proposed to pass the night. A light gleamed through the grimy panes.

“The King’s in his Castle,” remarked Cranbrook.

Sergeant-Major Whittaker knocked. Welland opened the door, a startled exclamation springing to his lips at sight of the scarlet coats.

"Good God!" he cried sharply. Then, "Oh, it's you! You scared me, boys. I never know who's prowling 'round in parts like these. But welcome—come right in."

"Did you think we'd come for *you*, old chap?" laughed Cranbrook, as they clanked across the threshold.

"You might have done, at that!" Welland grinned. "But what's the game, boys? Eh? Never mind that now, though. Whatever it is, you'll eat and spend the night here. I won't take 'No.' "

"Here's our orders to you, Welland," replied the Sergeant-Major. "A place for five horses; water for the same; use of your fire for cooking grub for four hungry men and a boy"—with a smiling nod at Hector—"and shelter till we choose to move."

"Done! I know you're after some darn whiskey-trader; so you're welcome more than ever," cried Welland. "Hey, Lizzie; fix fire, get table ready—quick, mighty quick. You're going to eat on me, Sergeant-Major."

At Welland's command, his squaw, a poor, bedraggled object, in home-made skirt and blanket, her hair braided and looped up behind, emerged from a corner and began to obey the orders of her lord and master.

"Now, the stable. Not a soul will guess your horses are there!"

He was a shrewd customer.

The horses put up, they all sat down to supper, while Lizzie waited on them. Welland treated her roughly and Hector's estimation of him bumped down suddenly. As they ate, Hector studied the room, which he had never seen before. It gave a not unfavourable insight into the owner's character. Surprisingly well furnished, it was carpeted in buffalo robes, its walls were hung with wolf skins, and pictures of places and people dear to Welland alternated with cuts from magazines to give it a touch of civilization. A couch covered by a gay Navajo blanket occupied a corner. Several first-class rifles stood in racks. There were books

on shelves. This was the home of a man of at least some culture.

"Think it funny to see those bindings here, Hec'?" the observant Welland asked. "I tell you, Joe's not as rough a diamond as he looks. I couldn't leave Bill Shakespeare behind me when I first came West; and I find a lot of people in these parts remind me of Don Quixote!"

Hector wondered if that was a dig at the Police. But he let it pass.

After supper, Welland for the first time broached the subject of their expedition.

"You'll find that 'Red-hot' Dan a real tough nut to crack," he said.

Hector wondered how Welland had guessed. Trained by this time to conceal his thoughts, however, he gave no sign. The laconic Martin did not move a muscle. The road was clear for Sergeant-Major Whittaker.

"I've heard he is," he answered smoothly. No blind betrayal of their purpose there!

"You have? Then you'll be careful what you do."

"*When* we arrest him—yes."

"I'd shoot at sight if I were you."

"We never shoot at sight in the Police, Joe."

"But 'Red-hot' Dan does."

"What's he got to do with us?"

"See here, Sergeant-Major—why not trust me? You needn't play you're not going after Dan, because I know you are. He's the only whiskey-trader operating 'round here and——"

"Trust you? Why, of course we trust you!" laughed the cunning Sergeant-Major. "But we don't talk about our work to—outsiders."

"I guess I should be snubbed!" said Welland. "That's a nasty slap to a man who wants to help you. I'm talking for your good when I tell you Dan's a devil. Wait till I tell you——"

And he narrated several stories of the trader's daring.

"Now," he concluded, "if that won't satisfy you, ask Martin there. Isn't Dan a dangerous man, Martin?"

Martin, apparently asleep, pricked up his ears like a dozing dog.

"You bet," he said.

"There!" Welland declared. "The whole country knows these things. You're new—and you should be warned."

"Trying to frighten us?" the Sergeant-Major asked.

"Yes, I am. If you'll take my tip, you'll go back to Fort Macleod for reinforcements. Five of you can't take Dan without bloodshed."

"You don't think much of us, that's sure." Whittaker smiled. "Now look, Joe Welland! We appreciate your warnings—but—how d'you know we're after 'Red-hot' Dan? And suppose we were—could we go back to the fort without trying to get him? How about Dan? Wouldn't he get wind of us and skip while we were away? How about our orders? But what's the use? Who said we're after him?"

"You're taking chances!"

"We can take 'em!" said the Sergeant-Major, fiercely brushing his moustaches.

"All right. Have it your own way! I've warned you, anyhow." Welland was obviously disappointed. "My hands are clean!"

II

At four o'clock, having covered the twenty miles between Welland's and the trader's in excellent time, they found themselves near the scene of action. The Sergeant-Major ordered Cranbrook to stay behind with the horses and the rest of them crawled to the edge of the ridge overlooking 'Red-hot' Dan's cabin.

Hector's heart beat fast. This was the first experience promising real danger which had fallen to him since he joined the Force.

Down in the long valley they saw the hut—grey, lonely, forbidding, in the dawn. But—unexpected blow!—it seemed deserted. In all the valley there was no sign of life. The shack was like a skull in the desert. Life had been there. It was there no longer. Had the wolf scented their coming and—taken to his heels?

"By the Lord!" muttered the Sergeant-Major, between clenched teeth, "the beggar's gone!"

Martin smiled cunningly.

"You think so? *I* don't! You see no trail going away—no. The beggar home, all right! But he play dead. No time get away, so he think: 'Pretend me gone. Foolum.' See?"

Light dawned on the Sergeant-Major's countenance.

"Now, listen: Dead snake always most bad snake. Always be more careful with dead snake. Make good plan now—he there, I bet you."

And so, assuming Dan at home, they made their plan. Keeping under cover, they crept to a point very near the shack. Sergeant-Major Whittaker posted Bland to cover the door from one hand, Martin from the other. To order the trader to come out was, they knew, quite useless. He would not surrender while the shack afforded him shelter. They must persuade him to admit them—then seize him. At the first sign of resistance, Martin and Bland were to shoot the man dead as he stood in the doorway.

"Come on, Adair," the Sergeant-Major smiled coolly. "You an' me must do the dirty work. Keep the bracelets handy."

So, their revolvers in their holsters, the pair of them approached the shack on the blind or windowless side. The sun was almost over the horizon. No sound, no movement betrayed a human presence in the shack. But one significant fact became obvious as they crept 'round to the front. The windows had been stoutly barricaded.

Close to the door they were, now—the air taut as a violin string.

The Sergeant-Major, motioning to Hector to remain where he was, strode boldly from cover and rapped thunderously on the heavy portal.

They heard only the echoes clapping through the rooms. Was there really no one there?

Again the Sergeant-Major knocked—twice—three times—without result. Then, like a drill instructor on the square, he bellowed:

"Open that door there—in the Queen's name!"

And then the answer came. A streak of flame flashed out, and a deafening report. Hector heard the bullet zip past him. The Sergeant-Major pitched down upon his face.

'Red-hot' Dan was 'Red-hot' Dan indeed—and decidedly at home!

III

Hector acted as his natural courage bade him; but how he got the Sergeant-Major away he never rightly knew. Bullets buzzed all 'round him as Martin and Bland maintained a rapid fire to cover his retreat. Through a tiny loophole in one of the barricaded windows keen eyes watched him as he dropped on his knees and crawled out to the motionless form. From this loophole other bullets came ringing, in quest of his life. Mechanically he lifted the little Sergeant-Major and slung him over his shoulders—his hot young strength standing him in good stead. A minute more and he was safely back with Bland and Martin, gazing stupidly at the Sergeant-Major, now lying on the ground, and asking, "Is he dead?"

His clothes were shot through, his hands bloody and he felt sick and shaken. But the spasm passed, leaving him—ready for anything.

Bred and trained for leadership, this was his opportunity. The Sergeant-Major knocked out, command of the party fell naturally into Hector's hands, hands preordained and long prepared to grapple with just such a menace. He had no thought of the benefits which would come to him if he dealt with it successfully. He only saw that someone must take the Sergeant-Major's place. He felt his powers rising to the occasion like a thoroughbred rising to a leap.

The Sergeant-Major, shot through the chest, was not dead but in great pain. Obviously, he must be sent away at once. Hector, now firmly in the saddle of authority, was already at grips with his problems.

"Tommy," he said to Bland, "I want you to take the Sergeant-Major back to Cranbrook. He'll manage it if you take your time. Then get on your horse, put the S.-M. on

his, and ride back to Welland's. After you get there, leave him with Welland and go on to the fort. Report to the Colonel and he'll send a cart and medical help to Welland's. Is that all clear?"

Bland nodded.

"Then listen. When you start for Welland's, ride with the Sergeant-Major over that ridge there, in front of the shack. Tell Cranbrook to follow you, leaving the other horses hobbled for the time being. After you're over that ridge, make straight for Welland's, while Cranbrook will go back by a detour, under cover, to where he leaves the horses and wait till we come. I'll tell you why I want this done. The fellow in that shack only knows that there are three of us—the S.-M. and myself, because he saw us, and someone else who fired at the house while I brought the S.-M. back. So when he sees three of you, one wounded, ride back over that ridge, he'll think you the whole party—that we've all gone off. Then he'll come out or get careless and we can surprise him. Savvy?"

"You're a corker, Hec'!" said Bland.

Hector's instructions were carried out precisely. In half an hour he saw three horsemen move slowly over the ridge, one supported by a rider on each side. They were in full view from the barricaded windows and their scarlet coats could be seen.

But the garrison of the shack was in no hurry to emerge. An hour passed—two—three. Hunger dug its claws into Hector. Nevertheless, he decided to wait till doomsday. Patience, he knew, would decide this battle. The force that held out longest would win.

If only 'Red-hot' Dan and his colleagues—if he had any—would show their noses for just a minute, the whole thing would be over. Hector's game was to hold them up, keeping under cover himself and to shoot them out of hand if they resisted. Dan, however, was too sly a bird. The afternoon wore on and still no sign of him was seen. Either he feared a trap or was perfectly content to spend the day indoors.

It was when his patience was exhausted that Hector evolved his second scheme. Pondering the situation, it came

to him in a flash of inspiration. He confided in Martin. The interpreter's patience was inexhaustible and, knowing that the waiting game was the sure game, he had not troubled to seek out any other. But now he vowed that the little tenderfoot was a clever little fellow and threw himself wholeheartedly into the plan.

Hector, taking off his boots, crawled up behind the shack and so to the roof, taking pains to make no noise. Then he awaited developments.

In time another actor came upon the scene, but from the front and marching openly forward. He was a half-naked Indian carrying a rifle in his hand. He knocked at the door. Hector's spirits leaped. The first sound of a human voice from within came floating gruffly upward:

"Who's there?"

The Indian, in Blackfoot, demanded fire-water. A panel in the door was opened and a face looked out cautiously. The moment, now, was at hand. Would the trader open the door?

'Red-hot' Dan, the Police forgotten, emerged, a cupful of liquor in his hand. The Indian raised his eyes—the signal meaning they had only one man to conquer. Straight and true, with deadly force and swiftness, Hector launched himself full upon the trader. The Blackfoot dropped his rifle, too. Their enemy resisted desperately, the atmosphere electric with his fair round oaths. But Hector's weight and strength and Martin's powerful aid—the Blackfoot was only Martin, undressed for the occasion—were far too much for him. In half a minute all was over. Hector had the handcuffs on his victim and 'Red-hot' Dan, terror of the plains, fiercest whiskey-trader in the country, lay sprawling beneath him, a hoodwinked prisoner.

IV

The Assistant-Commissioner promoted Hector to corporal for that day's capture, and set his feet on the long, steep road to victory.

Chapter IV

I

From beneath the skirt of the teepee a young prairie chicken emerged—no ordinary prairie chicken, but an absurd thing dressed in a little pair of trousers and a scrap of scarlet blanket. Hector grinned. The chicken stood irresolute, looking wildly 'round for a favourable avenue of escape. While it hesitated, two small brown hands and arms appeared from under the teepee and frantically searched the air. The chicken danced away. A dishevelled head next wriggled its way into the open air, two bright black eyes flashed a pitiful appeal to Hector, a soft voice cried:

“Oh, pony-soldier, please, pony-soldier—catch my prairie chicken—catch my baby!”

Burly Corporal MacFarlane, Hector's companion in this stroll through the Assiniboine encampment, smiled heavily but made no move. Hector started off in pursuit.

The ground was rough, his boots and spurs were very heavy, the agility of the baby was amazing and the crowded teepees were serious obstacles. Hector dashed 'round and 'round, close behind. He tripped, scraped his hands, stumbled up, heard MacFarlane's encouraging “For'ard on!” made another desperate effort, crashed over a box and emerged from the wreckage triumphant, the baby shrilling in his arms.

“Got him, Mac!” he called. “Now, where's the owner of this independent bird?”

He was at the teepee in a moment, but of the owner nothing could be seen. Two years and more had taught him that most Indian women were intensely shy with white men. He had learnt something of their languages from Martin Brent—the knowledge was useful in his work—and by this time could speak them fairly fluently. The little squaw had been overcome by shyness but was not far away.

He summoned her in her own tongue:

"Here is your prairie chicken, O chieftain's daughter! Come and get your prairie chicken!"

No answer came.

"O chieftain's daughter," he cooed seductively, "do not keep the poor pony-soldier waiting. And your baby!"

The charm brought results in time. Two hands were thrust from the door of the teepee, the fingers stretched to take the bird, but of the lady herself nothing was visible.

Hector was disappointed.

"Why don't you come out?" he coaxed. "Surely you will thank the pony-soldier—the poor pony-soldier who ran so far to bring your baby back?"

She came.

Hector had leisure now to confirm first impressions. She was very pretty, in her Indian way. Her gentle eyes, clear and limpid as a fawn's, glanced shyly upward at his own. Her lips, on which the smiles were trembling, were red petals from the prairie rose. The two thick plaits in which her hair was braided were of that rich blue-black which is the exclusive birthright of Indians and Latins. She wore an elaborately beaded buckskin dress, which truly marked her as the daughter of a chief. The rare beauty of her body, unspoilt by heavy work, the looseness of her dress could not conceal. Hector could not place her age, but she was delightfully young; and that was good enough.

"Take it," he said gravely, handing her the bird.

Taking it, her small fingers mingling with his, she spoke at last, a swift smile bringing light to her face, like a rainbow in sad skies.

"Thank you, pony-soldier, for catching my baby."

Serious, then, both were, till all at once the humour of the situation struck her and her smile flashed back to break in little rills of laughter. She laughed like a child, with her whole body. Hector burst out laughing, too, his spirit echoing back her mood. MacFarlane, behind, growled peevishly. A moment more and her shyness was back again. Her pet on her breast, a final word of thanks on her lips, she vanished, leaving Hector standing there.

"You laugh with my daughter, my son? That is good—for to laugh is to be happy."

Hector turned, surprised.

Before him stood a chief—a minor chief, as chiefs went, but as fine a figure as the plains could boast of, the very soul of chieftainship. He was tall and spare, straight and majestic as a pine, dressed in a barbaric splendor which became him to perfection. But his greatness was written mainly in his face. The wisdom of a hundred medicine men, made rich by long years of life, was in it, with strength, true strength—which is utterly devoid of arrogance or vanity—the calmness of a meditative mind, vast dignity and high authority. And his long white hair and mighty war-bonnet framed it all with glory.

"You laugh with her—is it not so?" he said.

"She has a cheerful heart," Hector answered, finding his voice.

"And you," the chief asserted, "you have one, too. But kind also—few white men would run to catch the pet belonging to a little squaw." He smiled. "You are interested in us? So you walk through the camp to see us?"

"Yes," said Hector.

"That is good, for we are brothers, you and I, though I call you 'son.' You must come and see us when you will. We are—you know it?—of the Assiniboines. My name is Sleeping Thunder, and my daughter's name is Moon-on-the-Water. So you will find us."

Moon-on-the-Water! She was like her name.

"I will come and see you soon, Sleeping Thunder," replied Hector.

As they walked away, MacFarlane threw in a ponderous comment.

"Funny old man! Girl's pretty, though—for an In'jun. You made a hit there, Hec'!"

II

Sleeping Thunder's camp was only one of many gathered together that day in the Fort Macleod country, where the

Indians were to meet the Queen's officials to make a treaty. Hector's division was there on escort duty.

The years had brought swift and sweeping changes. To-day Hector was a senior sergeant, though still in the early twenties, knowing his work inside out, intimate with the red men, an expert catcher of criminals and particularly of whiskey-traders, his special game. Honest, hard, dangerous work had put the triple chevrons on his arm. And drawing nearer every day, though still a dreary distance off, the first faint flashes of the higher light he sought were slowly opening before his eyes.

The Police had wrought great things in the few years behind them. The whiskey traffic had been much reduced and the old system of trading posts was gone, entirely and forever. The effect had been to convert the Indian to ways of peace. This in turn had brought the settler in who, up till now, had barely dared to show a timid nose in the country south of the Red Deer. Already the plains were dotted with homesteads, and cattle roamed along the grass lands soon to become tenanted by the immense herds of prosperous ranches. More settlers and more settlers were pouring out from the East. Before they could be accommodated, some title to the lands they wanted must be given them. The red men claimed the whole of the Northwest Territories. They were willing to relinquish them in return for certain privileges. So treaties were made with the great tribes in turn. And now the tribes of the Macleod district had come together to make their treaty too.

III

"You have a love for our ways and an interest in our customs?" asked Sleeping Thunder. "You admired our warriors?"

"Yes," Hector answered.

They were standing with Moon outside the chief's teepee on the last day of the treaty celebrations.

"Would you like to see more of them? You have not really seen us until you have seen the Sun Dance, which we hold each year in the summer."

"I want to see much more," said Hector. The romance of the things he had recently witnessed had fascinated him. "I would like to see the Sun Dance."

"Then hear me. If you do not mind camping with Indians, come to us next year and I will show you. I will teach you all our practices, our stories and legends and more of our language. It is too late this year, but next year—. I will send a messenger to tell you where to come and when. I would like you to come—and so would Moon."

"*You* would like me to come?" Hector asked, smiling at Moon.

She flashed a demure answer with her eyes.

An attractive little thing, this Indian girl!

"Then I will come," said Hector, seizing the opportunity. With that promise they parted.

IV

In June of the following year, Hector, in frontier outfit, his uniform laid aside, rode out to meet Sleeping Thunder and to see the Sun Dance.

MacFarlane saw him off at the stables.

"Who is she, Hec'?" he asked, raising his bushy brows and smiling meaningly. "That pretty little squaw, isn't it?"

Hector, whacking the pack-pony into motion and touching up his horse, looked down and smiled in return.

"You will have your little joke, won't you, Mac?" he said. "The girl's got nothing to do with it."

"Hasn't she?" MacFarlane mocked. "Oh, no—not at all!"

On the trail Hector headed southward, thinking of many things.

His interview with Sub-Inspector Lescheneaux, a wizened, bird-like French-Canadian commanding Hector's troop, when asking for leave, had been a droll but pleasing affair, ending very flatteringly.

"No leave ov h'absence since we first cam' out 'ere," the worthy little man had ruminated; "one ov bes' N.C.O.s in dis de-vision, *oui*; 'as don' more to stamp out d'illicit wheesk-ey traffic den any oder sergeant I know; desires leave

ov h'absence for one for'd'night; *vraiment*, 'e deserve it, too. Eef Inspect-eur Denton 'as no *objection*, Sergeant, you go by all means. I t'ink, Sergeant-Major Whee-taker, we say dis request granted, eh? Good luck, Sergeant—*bon voyage. Tiens!*”

The Sergeant-Major, too, had made Hector happy.

“He’s right—right, by God, he is! Since that day at ‘Red-hot’ Dan’s, Adair, yes, and before that, I marked you for a winner. You’ve certainly earned your little rest—damn my buttons, yes!”

This was true, all of it. Hector had worked hard. He had acquired a reputation in the Force as one of the smartest hunters of whiskey-runners it possessed.

But there were flies in the ointment and snakes in the grass. He had not yet been able, for all his hard work, to put down the traffic in the district allotted to him. Most of the traders and runners had long since fallen into his hands. Yet there was still a great deal of trading the source of which he could not trace. Some underground current was pouring through the district carrying liquor to the Indians. During the past few months he had made a particularly stern effort to dam the flood. Success would temporarily reward him. Then, suddenly, without warning, the stream would bubble out in some new spot—in twenty spots at once. The mystery troubled him. The hold it had secured on him made itself obvious in the fact that, though he had fixedly resolved to forget it for a fortnight, it had him now.

But the glorious appeal of the morning soon drove it from his mind. It was full June, the sky was a light blue dome, golden at bottom, where the sun blazed, and flecked elsewhere with baby clouds drifting before the lazy wind. The long grass, clean, shining, went rippling to the edges of eternity. The larks piped in the hollows and the little gophers sat up to watch him as he passed. Hector was young, the day was young, and troubles fly light as thistle-down over the heads of Youth when the time of the year is June.

In a minute or two he was singing a jibing song beloved

by the Force, that band of happy warriors who would not take things seriously :

*So pass the tea and let us drink
To the guardians of the land.
You bet your life it's not our fault
If whiskey's contraband!*

When he sighted Welland's place, where he planned to spend the night, his roving fancy clicked sharply back to roost and turned to Welland.

The friendship between them, though it had prospered in the years now gone, had never reached real intimacy. But Welland's fortunes had been amazingly strengthened during recent times. Prosperity seemed to come to him unsought. There was something almost strange in it. Probably he had money invested elsewhere. As men count wealth in other places, he was not yet a Croesus, of course, but a great improvement was palpably evident. Several new sheds and stables; acres of cultivated ground; cattle and horses; two wagons in the yard; the shack extended and freshly painted—these were obvious additions to the real and personal property owned by Welland when the Police first came to the country. Had he fallen heir to Aladdin's lamp? How, otherwise, had he acquired all this so easily?

As Hector rode slowly down upon the homestead through the velvet dusk, a strange thing happened. From the house he heard an awesome, chilling sound—dull, measured, heavy,—like blows on raw beef. And this sound was punctuated by several low screams, each whimpering, one by one, into a moan. Completely baffled, he dismounted near the stables, raised the 'long yell' that common courtesy demanded, and waited.

Welland came out, peering through the gloom.

"It's me, Joe," Hector called. "Adair!"

"Oh, that you, Hec'?" Welland responded with genuine pleasure. "Good boy! What brings you here this time o' night?"

Hector told him, still wondering——

"Leave, eh? Going down to Milk River, eh? Fine! Fine!

Of course you'll spend the night here, and feed, too. Come on! I'll take your horses."

When they entered the house, Lizzie was there, smiling cheerily enough on Hector, whom she knew well by this time—Lizzie, in a new striped skirt, sharing her man's prosperity.

"It couldn't be," Hector decided. Thereupon he placed what he had heard aside, in one of those innumerable pigeonholes of memory, where facts and incidents are unconsciously stowed away till wanted.

In the morning Welland gave him surprise No. 2.

"Hec', you're interested in the suppression of the liquor traffic," he asserted. "I don't know if you've come across this arrangement, though. It's one of the neatest things devised yet."

He handed him that common relic of the prairie, a buffalo skull.

"The horns, as you know, are hollow. The tips have been cleverly cut off and made into caps, to act as corks. You pour in the whiskey and put the caps on. Perfectly tight—perfectly safe! Load a cart up with buffalo skulls, same as all the Indians are doing now, mix a few of these among 'em and you can get your stuff into any reserve in the country without being caught. Who'd suspect a wagonload of buffalo skulls?"

Hector examined it, brain busy.

"Where did you get it?"

"One of those In'juns you arrested about two weeks ago gave it to me. I did him a good turn once. Want it?"

"I might get it when I come back. Here's how!"

"All right. Good hunting!"

Trouble brooded on Hector's face as he turned his horses out into the morning.

He was miles on his way before the holiday spirit came back to him and the buffalo skull went bang into its pigeon-hole.

Milk River, now! And Moon! And Sleeping Thunder!

v

The nights between the days which witnessed the Sun Dance Hector thought wonderful, for it was then that Sleeping Thunder opened his heart. Each night they sat beside the crimson fire, before the teepee, under a splendid canopy of purple strewn with stars. The silence of the plains, with only the howl of a lonely wolf by way of contrast, was about them as they sat, their voices took on mystic qualities unknown to them by day, the air was tense with hidden forces. Nothing stirred and there was nothing to divert them but the flitting form of Moon, attending the fire.

Hector spoke of one thing which dominated his mind, puzzling him.

"At this meeting, Sleeping Thunder, I have seen two ceremonies: one the making of a brave, the other the renewal of the vows of wives and maidens. To me these are as far apart as sun and earth. The first, to me—and I speak for all white men—is barbarous and cruel. But the second is very beautiful. Why do we find these things in the same race and practised by one people?"

Sleeping Thunder, answering him, revealed the entire sum and substance of his Indian philosophy:

"Because you find a thing you think terrible standing side by side with something that is beautiful, you are puzzled. But there is nothing strange in this. It is true to Nature. In one man, to say nothing of peoples, you will find great evils dwelling with much that is good. In the white race, as in the Indian, practices that are beautiful and practices that are ugly walk hand in hand. The white man's law, shielding the weak from the strong, is beautiful. The white man's gambling dens and saloons are not. The Indians, my son, are not the only people possessed at once by good and evil!"

The old man smiled, his bright eyes fixed on Hector.

"But is it evil——" he resumed, "this ceremony of making warriors? What, after all, do we most admire in a man? White men and red alike, we especially admire strength, courage and fortitude. *You* are content to await

the great test of action to prove that your comrades possess these qualities. Till then you credit them with all the strength, courage and fortitude they should rightly have. But we Indians, *we* are not so easily satisfied. We demand that a young man prove himself *before* the hour of action. When danger rises in your very path and Death awaits you with his arrow on the string, that is no time, we say, to test a man for the first time. Your safety, perhaps your life, depends, in that moment, on the courage, strength and fortitude of those about you. Then surely you should see that those about you are brave and strong and hardy before entrusting either life or safety to their keeping? That is wisdom, my son, that is right. The boy must show that he is fit to go before we take him with us. Therefore, we try him in the Sun Dance. If he succeeds—then, we need have no further doubts. If he fails—the lives of men are saved and no needless risks are encountered by the remainder of the tribe. The test is severe? Yes; because, otherwise, it would be worthless. But no lasting injury results. What, then, are a few drops of blood, a little agony?

“My son, the Indian does not shun, he embraces the opportunity of that ceremony. Does it not show that he has courage, strength and fortitude, which crown a man with glory as his antlers crown the caribou?

“Now in a woman—what do we admire?” The chief’s voice grew tender. “Is it gentleness, is it obedience? These things we honour, yes. But greater than these, and higher than them all, is Purity! White men and red alike, that is the thing we would have especially in woman. We are ourselves weak and corrupt. We feel in our hearts the need of something to help us to be better. So we ask that help from these, our women. We make of Purity a torch of light and put that torch in the hands of those we love, to guide us through the storm. We would have our women—” here he swept a hand towards the skies—“as high above us, as white and clear as yonder stars, to show the way, as *they* do. We would have them like the peaks of the World’s Backbone, which you call the Rocky Mountains, looking always, like them, upon our deeds, landmarks, like them, to

guide us by day, as the stars guide us by night, crowned with that virtue, Purity, as the peaks are crowned with spotless snow and, like those peaks, so glorious, so unchanging, so near the Great Spirit—nearer, far, than we!—that only to look on them fills our hearts with awe and wonder. So we would have our women.

“But here again the white and red man part. Your women shrink from a public declaration such as ours endure. Unlike you, we do more than teach our women purity. We ask them to dedicate themselves to purity before the eyes of all. We hold that virtue up before them as a thing to be prized. Then is the shame which follows any falling from the heights made trebly terrible. So do our women learn that it is for them to be true to the laws of the Great Spirit and leave love-making to the male—as with birds, animals, fishes, so must it be with men and women.”

Moon, in the shadows, stirred restlessly.

“Both these ceremonies, my son, are beautiful, for they glorify strength, courage and fortitude in men, purity in women. Then there is nothing strange in the observance of these ceremonies by one and the same people. I wonder—do you understand now?”

“I think—I think I see,” said Hector.

He looked for Moon; but she had disappeared.

VI

When the great meeting was over, Hector said goodbye to Sleeping Thunder.

“You go from us, my son,” the old man exclaimed, extending his hand, “knowing far more of my people than when you came. The Indian’s ways and the white man’s ways are not the same and it is not good that one should take to himself the habits of the other. The Great Spirit made us different and so we should remain. For one, vast cities, such as you have pictured to me—buildings of stone—sheltered lives; for the other, open plains—teepees—and roving lives that are wild and free. But it is good that we

should know one another, since, though you are white and we are red, we are not less brothers. For this, at least, you will not regret your visit, O my son, and I will always hold you as a friend—in time of need, especially, a friend. And now you ride back to your people and no-one knows when we will meet again. But we shall meet again, be sure of that!"

Hector smiled.

"I hope so, Sleeping Thunder," he said; then added regretfully, "Tell Moon I am troubled that she was not here to say goodbye. Tell her I do not understand."

Pain momentarily darkened the chief's face. Then he also smiled.

"Who shall read the mind of a woman?" he questioned. "Go your way. I will tell her."

Again they shook hands. Hector wheeled his horses and rode away.

An Indian watched his going from a clump of bushes on the outskirts of the camp, satisfaction gleaming in his eyes.

From the shadows, night after night, he had sullenly watched the stranger talking with the chief outside the teepee, watched him sitting with the father of Moon.

Loud Gun was glad to see the last of the white man.

Chapter V

I

The country round Fort Walsh lay deep in snow. The cold was intense. Darkness was falling.

Hector, turning back to the stove from this cheerless prospect, thanked God that no law-breaker—no whiskey-runner especially—was likely to be out on such a day, and hence, that he himself was unlikely to be required to take the trail.

He looked at the thermometer hanging in the window.

"Thirty below!" he said to himself. "I pity the poor Nitchies in their teepees."

The poor Indians well merited a little pity. This was, for them, a small-pox winter, a famine winter. Throughout the district, they were dying by thousands. The Mounted Police were working hard to save them, issuing rations and ammunition to the bands that crowded to them for aid. There were men out on the job at that moment. But they could do very little among so many.

Hector, dozing by the fire, thought suddenly of Moon and Sleeping Thunder, contrasting the terrible situation of to-day with that seen in the happy camp at Milk River months before. He wondered if any harm had come to them.

The door swung open to admit MacFarlane.

"Come in, Mac," Hector welcomed him. "Guard mounted?"

"Yes," said MacFarlane.

He plumped down in his ponderous way upon his comrade's cot.

"There's an In'jun outside, Hec'—wants to see you."

"An Indian?"

"Yes. Funniest thing," he chuckled. "Won't see anyone else. 'Sergeant Adair'—those were exactly the words.

The nerve of these confounded In'juns! What d'you think? There's the small-pox in camp and they want you there, to save someone or other. As if your life didn't count a damn! I'd have thrown the creature out, but she's so thin and drawn and came so far. You'll have to go and say 'No' yourself," he roared again, slapping his big thigh. "That comes o' making yourself too nice to 'em, Hec'! That comes of your trip to Milk River!"

"Eh?"

Hector had risen. His face reflected none of his comrade's mirth.

"Why, didn't I say? It's that little squaw, Hec'——"

"Where did you leave her?"

"Why, she's out in the yard, Hec'!"—MacFarlane's jaw had dropped. "You're—you're not—*going*?"

"You fool," Hector flashed. "Certainly I'm going!"

In the yard he found her—haggard, worn out, snow-encrusted, terrible.

"Moon!" he gasped, pity and horror in his voice.

"My father——" she answered dully. "He is dying."

Pleading desperately, trembling hands outstretched, she told him everything. The plague had suddenly appeared on the reserve some weeks before. Sleeping Thunder, to escape it, had taken to wandering with his band in the loneliness of the prairie; but without success. Two—three—had died. Then the chief himself had been stricken. Fear conquered loyalty, and the braves, closing their ears to the prayers of the old man and his daughter, left them to die.

"And Loud Gun?" asked Hector.

She smiled wanly.

"He was kicked by a horse long before. He was in the care of the white doctors—is still there. We were alone."

In this extremity, Sleeping Thunder had thought of Hector. By gigantic efforts Moon had grappled with the difficulties surrounding her and fought a way to Fort Macleod, her father helpless in the sledge behind her.

"We believed you were there," she explained simply.

Despair had almost mastered her when she learned that Hector and his division had been transferred to Fort Walsh.

But she had bravely turned her face to the new trail. That morning she had reached a spot some miles distant, pitched camp, made her father as comfortable as possible and pressed on to reach Fort Walsh before dark.

"I know that you will come," she ended.

For a moment he marvelled at the girl's strength and resolution.

Then he voiced another thought.

"But why did you come to *me*? You might have gone to your Indian agent—to any detachment. At Fort Macleod they would have helped you. Did you try them?"

"No," she said. "We wanted you. *You!* You alone can save him. We know you will give us what he needs. At Fort Macleod, they would not have helped us as you will help us."

"They would certainly have done so. I can do nothing more than they."

"You can save my father!" she repeated. "Say you will come!"

Hector tried to grasp the beauty and wonder of this thing. He had heard and seen a little of Indian fidelity and trust but until now had never guessed the depths they could fathom. Moon, travelling through all the difficulties confronting her, ignoring every hand that might have helped her, had come to lay her plea before him, with absolute faith that he alone could save her father. The thought humbled him.

But had she thought of the risks he must undergo? She was asking him to face almost certain death, at a time when her own people had deserted her, on the slight justification of their friendship. It was plain that she had thought of all this and in spite of them had not hesitated.

"I will always hold you as a friend—in time of need, especially, a friend."

There, in Sleeping Thunder's words, was the whole substance of the matter.

This was a time of need.

Hector did not waste an instant in considering the risks.

He accepted them, in the spirit in which soldiers accept the perils of battle, as inevitable.

"These people—God knows why—" he thought, "rely on me more than on anyone else in the world."

"I will come—at once," he said.

Moon dropped on her knees at his feet and burst into tears.

II

On a fine spring evening, Sleeping Thunder sat with Hector outside the teepee.

The chief, by this time, was fully restored to health.

"In a few days," he said wistfully, "I return to the reserve. The agent has sent for me."

"You should never have left it," Hector reproved him. "You know the law."

"Did the law save me and mine?" the old chief countered. "It could not have done for me what you have done."

Hector smiled quietly. He had given up trying to disillusion the Indian.

"And that," Sleeping Thunder resumed, "brings me to what I wish to say. Have patience. I am old and it is not easy for me to put my thoughts into words."

He gazed steadily out towards the West. The sun was sinking in as perfect a spring sky as Hector had ever seen. The wind rustled the long grass. A bird piped drowsily. A tethered horse stamped. All else was silence.

The figure of Moon, busy round the cooking fire, stood black against the sunset.

"My son, you may remember, long ago, when we were at the Sun Dance camp, I told you that the white man's ways are not our ways and one should not adopt the habits of the other."

"I remember," Hector answered.

"I have changed my mind. That is, I think sometimes the law may be set aside. I wish to set it aside now—today—or soon."

"Go on," said Hector.

"You saved my life. I owe it to you. I know it. No man can owe to another man anything more precious. Then how can he repay such a debt? In this manner only, my son—by offering him the thing he values most in all the world—values as highly as—perhaps more highly than—his life, by tendering it as a gift. So shall he repay the debt he owes."

Hector waited, wondering. The old man sat for a long while silent, his face very tender.

"You see my daughter there—Moon-on-the-Water? Is she not beautiful? She has the eyes of a young deer, her hair is like the sky at midnight, her form like a willow drooping by the river and, when she laughs, we hear the voices of the prairie winds. She is the daughter of a line of mighty warriors and the blood of many chiefs is in her veins. She loves me with all her heart—has she not proved it?—and I know that she would gladly die for me. She is a light among all women. Where will you find her like?"

Hector, remembering her mellow voice, the mystery of her smile, the graceful swaying of her dress, answered,

"Yes, she is beautiful. She loves you."

"She loves me—yes. And *I*?" The old chief's voice trembled. Far off, through the stillness, faint and doleful, they heard the sound of a trumpet at Fort Walsh. "And *I*?—I hold her dearer than anything I possess. Many have wooed her, my son, and I have been offered much for her. Ten ponies, fifty rifles, have been offered me by more than one lover. She is worth twenty ponies—compared with other women! And so—you see how dear she is to me and how high the value young men have set upon her."

"Yes," said Hector.

"Then, to repay the debt I owe you with that which is most precious to my heart, I offer you my daughter Moon, to be your wife."

"Your daughter Moon?"

"Yes."

Sleeping Thunder glanced keenly at Hector. The white man was silent; and he could not understand it.

"I know that I am pledging much. It is a great honour

I do you, my son." Smiling, the chief stretched out a kindly hand and patted Hector's shoulder. "But of all the world there is no man to whom I would more gladly give my daughter. You are a good man—strong, just, brave, true-hearted. And the debt I owe is great. Be not afraid."

The sunset glow was melting rapidly into the mauves and blues of night. Moon had stopped her work and Hector saw her gazing enraptured towards the West. The light was on her face and, in that moment, she was very beautiful.

But an agony of pity and despair possessed him.

"Sleeping Thunder," he said at last, scarcely knowing what he said, "I know how you have honoured me. Beautiful though your daughter is, faithful and precious to you, you are wrong, my friend—yes, I say it—you do not owe your life to me. The Great Spirit is my witness I speak truth. No, do not disagree with me. My comrade, Murray, he who nursed you through the winter—saved you, not I. This gratitude is lavished over nothing. I value it more than I can say, but still I know it is so."

Struggling with his thoughts, he steeled himself to go on.

"I cannot take this gift, Sleeping Thunder. I have not earned the right. I honour Moon, but—but—there is no love between us—not the love there should be between man and wife."

The old chief flinched and his grey head sank on his breast.

"Then how could good come of such a union? We do not love; and even if we did, your words were truth, Sleeping Thunder. The red man's ways are not our ways. How could she be happy in our life, among our people?"

"There are squaw men among you."

Hector had foreseen the interruption.

"Yes, but do they treat their wives as they should? You know they do not. They make slaves of them and when they are tired or they fall in love with a white woman, they cast them off. I could not do that and would not. But, aside from this, the girl would not be happy. My people—they would look on her with contempt. And as the years

went by and cities came where the prairies are desolate today, life would become intolerable for her. You know that is true."

The chief's head had fallen lower still.

"It is true," he whispered.

"I would give my right hand rather than that this should have happened. It cannot be—you know it, Sleeping Thunder."

The old man raised his head suddenly and looked up at the towering young form. He smiled sadly.

"It is true," he answered. "I will say no more."

The night swallowed them.

III

Returning to Fort Walsh, Hector had time to grasp the full significance of the chief's proposal. He had not even faintly foreseen that the old man's gratitude would express itself in the form it had actually taken. Marriage was far from his thoughts. Moon? He was fond of Moon and admired her in many ways—but not in that way. He admired and loved Sleeping Thunder. Hitherto relations between them had been ideal. But this sudden rock had split them and emphasized the unalterable differences in race and life. He wished with all his soul that things could have remained as they were.

Well, the thing was done and over! Only one course of action now remained for either party—to forget it all as soon as possible.

But here he found himself mistaken.

He had just come off duty on the afternoon when Sleeping Thunder was to start for the reserve when he was informed that an Indian was asking for him at the entrance to the fort.

The Indian was Loud Gun, recently back from hospital.

"How!" said Loud Gun, raising a hand in salute and looking down on Hector with his keen, proud eyes.

"How!" returned Hector. "What do you want?"

In a few words, the Indian explained. Moon-on-the-

Water had sent him. Would Hector go with him and ask no questions?

A few minutes later Hector was in the saddle.

In a little coulee some distance short of Sleeping Thunder's camp, they came suddenly upon Moon.

She was alone. In her richest dress, she made a striking picture—the picture of an ideal Indian princess—calm, strong, beautiful. They greeted her solemnly. As Hector dismounted, she turned to Loud Gun.

"Go over the ridge there," she said, "and wait till I come."

The tone was pitilessly cold. Loud Gun bowed his head submissively and departed without a word.

They were alone, the Indian woman and the white man, face to face.

Moon began.

"You wonder why I sent for you? Perhaps you think I step beyond the rights of squaws?"

Something of her dignity was gone. She smiled wistfully.

"I do wonder *why* you sent for me, Moon," responded Hector. "But that is all."

There was an awkward pause.

"What is it?" Hector prompted. "Come, what is it, Moon?"

She seemed dumb for a moment. Her head was turned away and her face hidden.

"Is it about your father?"

"Yes," she answered swiftly, with a sudden straightening of her head. "It is about my father—my father—and—"

"Nothing has happened?"

"No. But this matter—I was saying—it is about my father—and—and you—and me!"

He waited. She made a strange, gasping sound in her throat. He began to see a light.

"Moon!" he exclaimed, alarmed.

Her voice came thickly to him.

"My father said he did it as an act of gratitude. You said—you said there was no love between us. He did not do it as an act of gratitude. He did it—" She dropped her hands suddenly and all her strength came to sustain her in

that crisis. Her eyes were fearless. "He did it—because I wanted him to do it. You say there is no love between us." Her voice was half a laugh, half a moan. "No love with you, perhaps—but love—great love for *you*—there is with *me*!"

"No, Moon, no!"

"Yes!"—a whisper now—a sob that choked her—"I love you, pony-soldier! Pity me! Pity me!"

Amazement, deep concern, an overwhelming grief, swept over Hector. Why had she sent for him for this?

His talk with Sleeping Thunder had been nothing beside the possibilities before him now.

"Moon—"—he fought for words—was the soul of gentleness—"You are not yourself. This cannot be."

She wheeled suddenly, half turning her back. He saw her struggling fiercely with an emotion far more powerful than he had thought could move an Indian woman, least of all Moon.

"I know! I know!" she began. Bitterness, an agony of injured pride, a would-be scornful disregard of the humiliation she was facing, blended in the words that tumbled from her lips. "I know! I know that I—a chief's daughter—am not good enough for you. I know my love would bring you to contempt, would be a drag upon the wheels that take you on to greatness! I know that I would be a jest—a thing to scorn—a—a—"

"Moon," said Hector hotly, "that is not true! Why do you speak so of me?"

She calmed herself with an effort.

"It is not of you I speak," she smiled, with a glance towards him. "You are too kind, too generous for that. You would not scorn me, think that I dishonoured you, consider me a hindrance—no!" Her burning passion mastered her again. "But all your world—the white man's world—would do so. I am the daughter of a chief—I have said it—I am as good, in the eyes of the Great Spirit, as they are. I would be faithful to you and steadfast! I would work for you while life remained in me. But they would spit and laugh at me and call you 'fool' because you married me!"

Your white world—your white men—ah, and your white women, your white women!—they would do that. And why? Why?” She rocked in anguish. “Just because I am an Indian—an Indian!”

He could not answer her.

She turned again towards him, terribly overwrought, clutching her breast.

“*That* is true! You know it!”

“Moon—please do not say these things.”

“It is true—will you not admit it? Ah, you will not speak—that means you agree. Because you do not wish to hurt me, you will not speak—but you answer with your silence.”

A long pause came. Hector wheeled and looked, unseeing, towards Fort Walsh. Waiting, he heard her fighting back to calmness. She brought herself at last to look at him. His cap was off, his profile cleanly cut against the strong sunlight, his hair ruffled by the soft wind and his scarlet tunic was like a flame to her senses. Her love for him welled up like a strong, deep tide in her desolate heart, mastering her.

“Yet I must face the degradation,” she said suddenly, vast tenderness giving a pleading beauty to her voice, “because I love you—I cannot help myself. If I might be your wife—Oh, then I would laugh at all the cruel contempt that poor Indians like me have ever known! But if that cannot be—then let me be your servant and slave. Only to see you, to give my life to your service!”

“Moon,” he declared, “I will hear no more. I will not have you speak like this to me!”

“Oh, do not think to save me from shame.” She laughed bitterly. “Already I—the daughter of a chief—have broken the laws of my people in telling you my love. I will be an outcast. The sin is on my head. Then let me speak and beg that I may be your slave. I could keep silent no longer. Long have I loved you. You would not hear my father. But I cannot bear to give you up. So I sent for you. And all I ask from you is pity—pity! As for the scorn of my people and yours—I do not care!”

Her passion died away, exhausted, in a little while. And he took her hand and answered her.

"Listen, Moon," he said. "No-one will ever know that this has passed between us. There is no shame in this for you. I hold you too highly ever to grant this prayer of yours. It is not right. Your father said that white men and red cannot live together as man and wife in happiness. There are many Indian warriors, good men, brave and true, who love you. There is Loud Gun—"

"I do not love him!" she flashed.

"There is Loud Gun," he repeated remorselessly. "He loves you. Marry him—and forget me. I will always be your friend, Moon—"

"I cannot forget you. I love you," she persisted.

He shook his head.

"You *must*. Be sure, you will be happy with him. We must not meet again."

"Pity me!" she whispered.

He turned blindly and heedlessly to his horse.

"Pity me!" she almost shrieked.

But he was mounted now. And, as she flung out a desperate hand, he touched his horse with the spur.

He heard her wailing, Indian fashion, behind him—forced his mount to a fast gallop—faster, faster, to drown that dreadful sound in the rush of wind.

Weak tears blinded him.

So he left her.

IV

Before another day had passed over Fort Walsh, Hector had pondered the situation regarding Moon and come to certain conclusions. First of all, he must obviously see no more of the girl. Secondly, he must do something to repair the damage he had innocently caused. Here he ran into a stone wall. How was he to influence Moon without seeing her himself? In whom could he confide his difficulties, knowing that they would meet with sympathy? Was there anyone he knew with the necessary authority among the

Indians, whose words carried weight and whom they loved and trusted?

A battering-ram appeared suddenly from nowhere and smashed the barrier down.

His man was Father Duval.

Father Duval and his work were equally well known to every man in the Police or out. None could say how long he had been in the North-West but only that he seemed as much a part of the country, as strong and staunch and vital and even as eternal as the Rockies. He had made one at the first Christmas celebration of the Force at Fort Macleod six years before and at that time was alleged to have already passed the greater part of his life as a missionary among the tribes in the district. His influence with the Indians, converts and otherwise, was illimitable. They regarded him as their spiritual and temporal parent and went to him for counsel in every predicament. His face was as familiar to them as those of their greatest chiefs, his black-robed figure as common to their camps as a travois or a teepee. The Police recognized him as a useful medium for dealing with the Indians in matters requiring great diplomacy. He was the cheerful, tireless go-between for white man and red, the friend of every Indian, settler and Mounted Policeman.

Father Duval was obviously the man.

As soon as Hector could get away he sought the priest out, riding over to the mission.

"Yes, he will see you," said the lay-brother, lifting a cloud from Hector's heart.

At a knock, the door of the severe little room which was the priest's sanctum was opened and the renowned Father Duval himself stood on the threshold, the kindest and most lovable of men, his hand outstretched, a twinkling smile upon his rugged face.

"Ah! *Entrez, mon petit!*" he exclaimed. "*Parlez-vous francais?*"

Hector shook his head and faltered out a negative. Father Duval's smile deepened and he shrugged his shoulders whimsically.

"Too bad, too bad! Teach yourself, *mon petit*. It ees

ver' important to comprehen' many lan-gwidges, *oui*. *Eh bien!* We try to—'ow ees it?—get along without it. *Entrez, cher ami, entrez!*"

By this time they had shaken hands. Hector jingled into the room, his uniform sounding a note of war in that haunt of peace. The contrast between them was very marked. The older man was like an old tower, strong in age, solid, the younger like a steel blade, keen, vivid, highly tempered. They sat down.

Hector slowly, hesitatingly, began his story. Father Duval listened, one hand on his chin, the other in his sash, his eyes, possessed by just a shadow of encouragement, incessantly fixed on Hector.

When at last Hector ceased, the priest put out a hand and laid it over his, smiling so sympathetically that Hector knew him a friend and helper from that moment.

"You—are you of our faith?" he asked.

Hector shook his head.

"*Mon enfant,*"—his face seemed to light up with a holy radiance—"it does not matter. I bless you all de same. You 'ave don' right to come to me, Sergeant. All you 'ave don' in dis *affaire* 'as been right. You 'ave acted as a man ov honour, *oui*, an' wit' such a beeg, beeg 'art. Ah, *mon petit, le Bon Dieu*, 'e smile, *vraiment*, when 'e look down on men lak' you. *Mes pauvres petits*, de Indian, dey do not get ver' much de consideration you 'ave give to dat ol' chief an' 'is leetle girl. *Maintenant, regardez!* 'Elp you—but of course—*naturelment!* *Attendez une minute!* I 'elp you, *oui*. For I am well acquaint' wit' dat leetle Moon an' *mon brave* Sleeping Thunder. Only, 'ow? 'Ow? What to do? *Attendez! Attendez!*

Hector waited.

"You say de name ov dat yo'ng fellow, it is—?" the priest queried suddenly.

"Loud Gun," said Hector.

"Loud Gun? *Oui. Bon!* I 'ave it now. I feex it all. *Regardez, mon petit.* Don't you worry no more. I will see dat poor leetle girl made 'appy, *oui*. She marry some good

Indian fellow—Loud Gun perhaps, perhaps some oder—but she will forget you an' she will be 'appy, *oui, vraiment*, I will send you a leetle letter later on an' tell you all about it. An' now, don' you be sad, leetle boy." He patted Hector on the shoulder and beamed up into his eyes with beautiful benevolence. "So de poor Moon, she fall in lov' wit' you, eh?" he added softly. "*Vraiment*, Sergeant, I am not soo-prise'! A fine beeg fellow—an' ver' 'an'some, *oui*. Now, go—*allez, mon petit!* Forget all dis—an' I write to you. It all come out right soon—you see!"

"God bless you, father!" Hector exclaimed.

His spirits had leaped as high as heaven.

v

"Here's a letter, Hec'," said MacFarlane, three months later. "An In'jun brought it. You're a devil for the In'juns, Hec', old boy!"

Hector took the letter curiously. No Indians were in his mind.

The letter was from Father Duval. Some English lay-brother had written it but the priest's unmistakable signature brought it to a close.

'Dear Sergeant Adair:

Don't fear. She is happy. I have married her myself, today, at my mission here, to Loud Gun. I promise you, her heart is mended! She is happy.

I am always your friend,

FRANCOIS M. DUVAL, O. M. I.'

Slowly Hector read the letter, as slowly tore it into little pieces—as one who tears something that is past and done with—and, going to the open window, let the pieces fly from his fingers in the prairie breeze. . . .

"You're a devil for th' In'juns, Hec'," MacFarlane repeated.

The sweet face of Moon drifted momentarily before Hector's eyes, in the wake of the scraps of paper—fading, at last, like them—a something done with—

“You’ve got a soft spot for ’em, haven’t you, eh?” MacFarlane persisted.

“Yes,” said Hector.

Chapter VI

I

Old problems were disappearing now in the North-West Territories, new problems cropping up, old crimes and criminals dying away, new crimes and criminals upon the increase. During the two years which had passed since Hector first met Moon, he had been constantly dealing with these matters, old and new, under desperate conditions. Sheer bull-dog grinding in the face of gigantic difficulties; days and weeks of ceaseless exposure to the cruel cold of midwinter, the fierce heat of midsummer, drenching rain, stabbing blizzard, rivers in flood-time, trails knee-deep in mud; innumerable arrests, when, single-handed he dragged the wanted man, fighting like a mad dog, from under the very wings of Death, in the face of regiments of carbines; other arrests, quiet, subtle, efficient; cases which took inexhaustible patience to bring to a conclusion; cases which leaped from nowhere, demanding instant decision and unhesitating action; and all these cases and arrests, trackings, traps and desperate fights requiring at one time or another, the tip-top pitch of courage, zeal, determination and diplomacy—these things had been Hector's life in those stirring years.

The whiskey-smugglers, haling their stuff across the border for the consumption of Indians and whites, still occupied much of his attention. These were old hands, dealing in old crimes. The worst of the new enemies of the law were the cattle-rustlers, who came in with the ranching industry. Some were whites, most were Indians.

Hector had gradually come to the conclusion that—in the Macleod district at least—the whiskey-runners and cattle-rustlers were operating hand in glove from some central headquarters. Some clever criminal, or group thereof, had organized the two activities into one gigantic business. So

far he kept these suspicions to himself, because he had not yet enough evidence to lay before the Inspector. In the meantime, he worked away steadily and in the working gained a reputation for physical strength, courage, determination and a high sense of duty among the officers and men, the settlers and the Indians which was worth far more than any King's ransom.

In the autumn following the receipt of Father Duval's letter he was re-transferred to Fort Macleod. There occurred an incident which nearly wrecked his reputation for all time.

II

"We've got a shipment here for you, Sergeant Adair," announced Randall, the keeper of the Weatherton Company's store at Fort Macleod. Hector walked over to the counter through the crowd of Indians, settlers and policemen.

The trader, when he reached him, was busy with a customer and Hector had to wait. He passed the time in talking to Welland, who was lounging at his elbow—Mr. Joseph Welland now, keener, sprucer, more cordial and certainly more prosperous than ever.

"Well, Hec'—how's the whiskey-running? Putting it down any?" Welland began, while he carelessly picked his teeth with a bit of match.

The question was delivered in a low tone, implying caution.

"So-so," Hector replied vaguely.

Experience had taught him to trust nobody.

"But they're a cunning crowd behind it," he added.

"So they are," Welland agreed emphatically. "Not a doubt of it. That bunch in the Calgary country, now—"

"Is there a bunch working in the Calgary country?" asked Hector innocently.

"You know there is." Welland twinkled. "Guileless angel, ain't you? But, talking of whiskey—"

"Talkin' o' whiskey, are yah?" The trader's oily voice cut in suddenly. "*You'll* be able to talk o' whiskey for a long time, Sergeant, when you've signed this invoice!"

He winked meaningly at Welland, whose face for one moment betrayed surprise, then became intensely vigilant.

"What's this? What's this?" he exclaimed, half in jest, half in earnest, while his eyes flashed swiftly to the invoice.

Hector read and signed the piece of paper, which told him that Mr. John Adair, of Blenheim County, Ont., had recently shipped to him through Weatherton's chain of stores, evidently as a Christmas gift, one case of Scotch whiskey.

"Well, I'm shot!" Welland remarked. "I'll come an' see you when you've opened it, Hec'. How'll you get it into barracks?"

The last demand, with its veiled insinuation, irritated Hector. But he snubbed Welland by showing no concern.

"Bring it to my quarters next time you're over that way, Randall," he told the store-keeper.

"You're on, Sergeant," Randall leered, rolling his bleary eyes. "An' I hope to drink your health."

"You'll do it in water, then," Hector said quietly. "This whiskey goes to Mother Earth and no-one else."

"Wha-a-t?" Welland cried, amazed. "You're not—?"

"Yes, I am." Hector gathered up his whip and gloves. "I'm going to spill the lot of it, in Randall's presence, too. Nobody's going to say I'm a wholesale drinker myself and down on everyone else drinking."

"But Hec'! It came in a perfectly honest, legal way—"

"Can't help that. Shouldn't have come at all. I can take a drink with others, on the square or in the mess. But I'm not going to stock it myself. I've got too many people ready to take a crack at me and I won't run any chances."

"But Hec', it's a crime to waste—"

"No!" said Hector, real determination in the negative.

Welland drew back, defeated, shrugged his shoulders, and looked at the trader with a sneer.

"Hell!" he exclaimed audibly. "'Course he wants it for himself. That goody-goody stuff is bluff. That's the way with these zealots—no liquor, no! But that just applies to *you*—not me!"

The tone surprised Hector. He had not expected this thrust from Welland.

"Will you come over and *see* me get rid of that whiskey?" he flashed.

But Welland only laughed derisively.

"Well, Randall will be witness enough," Hector declared. "Think what you please, and be damned!"

With that, he clanked fiercely out of the store.

The trader exchanged glances with Welland, his florid face growing redder with suppressed delight.

III

Though John had sent the whiskey in a perfectly legitimate way, Hector could not use it, for the reason that, to do his work properly, he must keep up his reputation as an incorruptible enemy of liquor. If he gave way, his enemies would certainly adopt the cynical attitude that Hector, being able to get whiskey for himself whenever he pleased, had nothing to gain by winking at the operations of those less fortunate and so was zealous where he would otherwise have been slack. A better course than destroying the whiskey would have been to ship it straight back to John in Welland's presence; but Hector failed to think of this at the time.

In the late afternoon, Randall drove his sleigh into barracks.

"I got the case outside, Sergeant," he said. "Will I bring it in?"

"No," said Hector. "Dump it on the parade-ground."

Hector took an axe. They went out together.

"Why, Sergeant!" exclaimed Randall, in great alarm. "Yah ain't *really* goin'—? Ah, say, don't, Sergeant, don't! It's a sinful waste o' the gifts o' Providence, Sergeant—Ah!"

His voice rose to a shriek as Hector reduced the case to a pulp of splintered wood and broken glass.

"Now you tell anyone who ever mentions it *what* I do to private stock, Randall," said Hector, as he pitched the

wreckage into the sleigh. "You understand. You've got to tell the truth. *Savvy?*"

"A'right, Sergeant, a'right!" Randall shrank back in alarm. "But it's an awful waste o' good Scotch!"

He drove off lamenting.

Hector's mistake had been in securing only one witness to the destruction of the whiskey. He was to pay for it later.

IV

Soon after this, Hector noticed a distinct falling off of the respectful regard held for him by the officers, the men, the civilians. They did not force the change upon him but they hinted at it in a thousand ways.

At a loss for an explanation, he did the wisest thing possible—ignored the change and went on his way in silence.

One day came light, when Inspector Denton summoned him and revealed the truth in a private interview.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Hector, entering the Inspector's sitting-room and saluting smartly.

Inspector Denton was a big man, much inclined to fatness. He had a ruddy face eloquent of good living, a drooping, luxuriant moustache, and an eye-glass which he hardly ever used. Ignorant recruits, judging by appearances, took him for a brainless martinet. As a matter of fact, the strength of a lion, the heart of a Viking and the endurance of a grizzly were hidden beneath his deceptive exterior and when action demanded those who doubted it were rapidly disillusioned.

The Inspector, as Hector entered, was seated by the stove, his tunic open, his feet in gaudy carpet slippers.

"Ah, Adair!" exclaimed the Inspector. "Er—just close the door, will you?"

Hector obeyed.

"I've been—ah—hearing tales about you, Adair," the Inspector began, composedly. "I don't like 'em. My advice is—er—if they're true—stop! I find it difficult to believe 'em, Adair. So I thought I'd talk it over quietly with you—er—alone."

'Tales about you!' Hector saw in a flash that the causes of the mysterious change were about to be revealed to him.

"Very good, sir," he said; and eagerly waited.

"*Are they true?*"

"I don't know what they are, sir."

"You don't, eh? *Umph!*"

The Inspector pondered. Then he looked at Hector again.

"Like me to tell you? Well—er—fact is, Adair, they say you're doing a lot of secret drinking, on cases sent from the East an' so on. Very foolish, Adair, if so. Must drink openly or not at all. Ah—makes your work in suppressing the traffic look so—so hypocritical, y'know—besides bringing the Force into disrepute. It's rather hard to explain what I mean but—er—you understand, eh?"

Hector's face crimsoned with passion.

"It's a lie!" he rapped fiercely. And he told the Inspector everything.

"I see!" said Denton thoughtfully. "I *see!* Well, we must kill this lie—er—immediately, Adair. It's done you a lot of harm—shaken people's confidence in you—er—considerably, very considerably. Even I was—er—a bit affected. Now let's see. How can we kill it, eh? How can we kill it?"

"I'll kill it, sir!" said Hector decidedly. "I'll kill it, all right!"

"Right you are, Adair! Good example, eh? Even stricter attention to duty—if that were possible—eh? But no violence. Anyway, that's all about it, s'far as I'm concerned. Damn' glad it wasn't true, Adair. Er—settle it quietly, eh? Damn' glad, Adair. Close the door, er—will you, when you go out?"

So this was the cause of the change in feeling! Obviously, it was the work of Randall or Welland, who must at least have started the rumour, whatever their part in its subsequent growth may have been! The story must be killed, the Inspector had said. Well, he would kill it, there and then!

Conscious of his innocence, Hector, for the first time since joining the Police, lost that crowning attribute, self-control.

On fire to avenge his honour, he left the Inspector's and went rapidly over to Weatherton's.

v

The door of the store was dashed open. Fifty startled men, settlers, constables, Indians and half-breeds, turned together towards it, leaving a lane to the counter.

Sergeant Adair came in. They all knew him—but not this Sergeant Adair. The quiet, friendly yet sternly restrained N. C. O. was gone and in his stead was a passionate giant, fists clenched, eyes like knives, lips set and cheeks aflame.

A hush fell on the crowd. It remained for Joe Welland to break it.

The rancher, in a big buffalo coat, was smoking a cigar at the counter. Turning with the rest, he looked at Hector coolly, though with genuine concern, and his voice cut evenly through the silence:

“What's the matter, Adair?”

Hector gripped himself before replying. He was joyfully conscious of the presence of many of his friends, assembled, as if by preordainment, to witness his vindication. There was MacFarlane, staring open-mouthed; Sergeant-Major Whittaker, by the stove, motionless in the act of pulling on his gloves, alert as a bird; Jim Jackson, master of ceremonies at the first Christmas celebration at the fort years before, pausing as he buttoned his fur coat for the trail; Martin Brent, seated on a sack of flour, pipe in mouth, stoically viewing the proceedings; Cranbrook—Corporal Cranbrook now; and a dozen others. For a moment Hector marshalled his words. Then he stepped swiftly into the centre of the room, the silent crowd shrinking before him.

“*This* is the matter!” he burst out furiously. “Which of you two started these lies about me—you—or you?”

And he pointed an accusing finger, first at Welland, then at Randall.

Deathly silence came again. Men looked at one another. Welland gaped.

"What d'you mean, Hec'? No-one's——"

"Oh, yes, they have! Someone's been spreading tales that I've been getting secret whiskey from the East. Don't deny it! I know positively the story's gone 'round for weeks. Am I right, boys?—am I right?"

He flung the appeal to the crowd. They growled assent.

"That's right—that's true."

"Do you hear them?" Hector cried. "There's proof, isn't it? Now, which of you two began it? *You* know, Welland, that I had a case sent unexpectedly from the East. Randall knows it. You know I said I was going to destroy it. Randall saw me smash it with an axe that same afternoon. Now, no one else in the world knew that whiskey had come to me! Then, which of you spread the story? That's what I want to know."

The crowd waited breathlessly.

Welland calmly flicked the ash from his cigar and smiled.

"Say, you can take this as straight," he asserted. "*I've* said nothing. If anyone's told any yarns, it's Randall there, not me."

And he glanced with stern contempt at the store-keeper.

Randall started, staring with alarm and consternation.

"Well, say!" he shrilled. "For God's sake, Welland——"

"You shut up!" flashed Welland. Then, quietly, to Hector: "That's your man, Adair."

Hector turned quickly to the crowd.

"Did this man start the rumour?" he demanded, pointing at Randall.

For a moment no-one answered. Fear of a tempest held them silent.

"Did he?"

"I heard it first from him, Sergeant."

The voice, pleasant, careless but assured, was Cranbrook's.

That broke the spell. A chorus of "So did I," "I did, too," rolled solemnly through the crowd.

Hector's fury broke.

MacFarlane raised a husky shout as a dozen bystanders threw themselves on Hector:

"What'you going to do? What'you going to do?"

Jim Jackson rushed into action, shouting, "No, Adair—no!"

Then came a babble:

"Hold him! Hold him!" and a storm of curses——

At the stove Whittaker still stood motionless but smiling quietly——

And Hector burst out of the crowd like a lion from a thicket of spears, grim, silent, deadly. He tossed Jackson and MacFarlane aside with a great sweep of his arm—the powers of twenty men added to his own giant strength in that moment. The trader's frenzied shriek, "Sergeant—for the love of Christ!" he did not heed at all. Seizing Randall in a grip that brought a scream to his lips, he dragged him swiftly across the counter. The scattered crowd closed in. Seeing them, he swung the trader like a flail through the air, dashing them off their feet. In the cleared space, he shook his victim as if he were a sawdust dummy.

"You dog! You dog!" they heard him crying.

Once more the crowd rushed, to save Hector from murder.

"Get back, damn you! He's mine!" Hector roared, pinning the maddened Randall against the counter and staving them off.

"Say you're a liar, you cur! You swine!" he gasped. "Say it or I'll kill you—I'll kill you——"

"I am! I am!" sobbed Randall. "Sergeant—Sergeant——"

"Let him go, Hec'! Let him go!"

MacFarlane's voice gave Hector back his sanity. But, shifting his grip, he tossed the trader, screaming, above his head and held him there, his eyes roving furiously 'round the room.

Then, taking ten great strides, he hurled him crashing but unhurt into a pile of hardware.

"I could kill you!" was in his mind. But instead he said, "Lie there, you dog; lie there!"

Ignoring the crowd utterly—it parted in his path with awed silence—he went to the door, flung it wide open.

The crash of the heavy portal slamming to aroused the crowd to tumult.

VI

Within twenty-four hours the whiskey rumour was as dead as a last year's calendar and Hector was back upon his pedestal.

Mention of his name thenceforward produced this invariable comment:

"Play straight with Adair. He's an easy-goin' bird, but a ring-tailed devil when he's roused!"

Chapter VII

I

Some weeks after the clash with Randall, the Chester affair occurred.

Hector was in charge of the Police herd-camp a few miles from the fort. One morning the detachment shifted to a new site. Chester was a shy, retiring sort of youngster, newly joined. During the move Hector placed him in charge of the tools. As a result, the only axe was left behind. At dusk the loss was discovered and Hector sent the boy off to get it, promising to follow him and aid the search himself.

Darkness fell while he was still some distance from his objective. He caught himself wondering why he did not meet Chester. Reassuring himself with the thought that the boy had perhaps encountered some unforeseen difficulty, he pushed on. But no sign of Chester greeted him. All about the old camp was lifeless and silent.

Returning to camp as rapidly as possible, he hoped to find the missing man there before him. The cook's anxious enquiry disillusioned him:

"Is that you, Chester? And have you got the axe?"

"Turn out, the lot of you," said Hector. "Chester's lost."

Lanterns were lighted and the whole party made an extended search on foot. The results were disappointing. The discovery of the axe added to their alarm.

Hector reported the affair to Inspector Denton, at the fort, who promised to send out a large search party at dawn. To continue the hunt at night would have been futile.

Next morning, in a little hollow as yet untouched by the wind, they found the first clue—a sprinkle of blood, among jumbled hoof-prints—and a wide cast revealed Chester's hat in a clump of bushes. They searched the woods. More evidence of a foreboding character was then quickly gath-

ered and the reason why Chester's horse had not returned was made clear.

Hector himself found the horse. It had been led into the woods, tied to a tree and shot.

And then they found Chester himself. The body was lying in the bottom of a deep ravine, where it had been thrown. The foulest of foul work had been done, for he had been shot in the back at short range.

In the days and weeks that followed, they exhausted every resource, but the murder remained an unsolved mystery.

II

"Beg pardon, sir," said MacFarlane, waylaying Inspector Denton as he passed the guard-room. "The In'juns say they'll talk now. And they want you, with the interpreter, sir, and Sergeant Adair."

The Inspector wheeled quickly.

"Good! Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Is Brent back? Then send a man for 'em right away."

Twenty-four hours previously, Hector had carried out the arrest of a gang of Indian horse-thieves, accused of stealing stock from the 'Lazy G,' an 'outfit' in Montana. They had refused to talk, however, having apparently decided to say nothing whatever until the day of trial. Martin was away and the best linguists in the division had been able to produce no effect. MacFarlane's announcement relieved the Inspector's mind considerably.

When all four—the Inspector, Hector, Martin and MacFarlane—were assembled, they held a consultation outside the guard-room.

"Why in—ah—heavens," said the Inspector, "wouldn't they talk before?"

"Yes—what was the idea?" Hector agreed. "I made everything clear to them. But they wouldn't speak a word."

Martin laughed. He knew the Indian mind better than any of them.

"They got what chaplain call 'guilty conscience,' " he declared. "One thing—they either 'fraid say a word, fear

give themselves away, or other thing—they think you have um for bigger job than horse-steal but you won't let on. You bet your boots, that it! They either make confession or give some other feller away. That why they want me an' Inspector. You see—damn quick."

To a number of a dozen, villainous-looking warriors every one of them, the Indians rose to their feet as the Inspector came in. A good deal of parleying then resulted in Bear Sitting Down, who was their leader, being elected to speak for them all. And Martin began.

"Why did you not say what you have to say to Sergeant Adair?"

The Indian looked uncomfortable.

"We would rather talk to you," he said.

"Well, what have you to say?"

Bear Sitting Down glanced nervously 'round the room. The other Indians watched him intently.

"Come," Martin said in his most commanding voice. "Answer quickly. What have you to say?"

Bear Sitting Down shuffled his feet, cleared his throat and at last exclaimed desperately, with the air of a man goaded to action:

"We did not do it. We know we have been arrested on that account. But we had no hand in it."

"No hand in it?"

"No hand in it—none!"

The spokesman's companions seconded him with anxious monosyllables of approval.

Martin's keen eyes flickered.

"Why didn't you tell the Sergeant so when he arrested you?" he asked.

"He told us he was arresting us for horse-stealing. But we know better. We have stolen horses, yes. But we had no hand in the killing of the pony-soldier."

Martin quivered like a dog on an unexpected scent. Otherwise, he betrayed no emotion.

"You are *known* to have killed him," he said calmly, "and you will all be hanged."

The shot in the dark flashed home.

"No—no—no!" exclaimed Bear Sitting Down. The Indian fear of the rope was evident in his face and he trembled in every limb. "You will not hang us if we tell you who killed him?"

"Not if you speak truth."

Inwardly, Martin was still completely puzzled, but he went on bluffing cleverly.

"I will tell all," said Bear Sitting Down. "The man who did it was Wild Horse. He came to us that night and he said, 'I have killed one of the Shagalasha. I killed his horse also and I threw the body into the ravine.' If you arrest Wild Horse, you will find that this is so."

The mystery solved—at last!

Martin turned swiftly to the other Indians.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" they answered eagerly. "It is true—true!"

"Come 'long outside," said Martin to the Inspector, with as much excitement as it was possible for him to show at any time.

"That feller," Martin declared very impressively, "He think you lie, Sergeant. He think you take him up, not for horse-steal—just bluff, that—though he say it true he steal horses, but for murder Constable Chester last spring. An' he say—all say—did not murder Chester. 'You no hang me if I tell who did it?' he ask. 'No hang you,' I say. 'Then,' he say, 'I tell you. Wild Horse kill him!'"

III

A fortnight elapsed before Hector was able to attempt the arrest of Wild Horse. The Indian had taken alarm with the apprehension of the horse-thieves and had left the reserve. Sooner or later, Hector knew, he would return, thinking the storm blown over. It behooved the Police to be ready to take him when that time came. They placed the reserve under the observation of Liver-eating John, a half-breed scout, whose orders were immediately to report to Hector any news concerning the whereabouts of Wild Horse.

So the fortnight dragged by. Then, in great haste, one afternoon, came Liver-eating John.

"Wild Horse, he sneak in 'bout noon," he told Hector. "Me see um—self. He be there p'raps two days. Hide in brother's lodge. Go, get him, quick!"

Within fifteen minutes, Hector and his men were on the trail.

Among those who had recently committed themselves to the baby business of ranching in Western Canada was Colonel Stern, a veteran of the Indian Mutiny and several other wars. Failing fortunes had driven him from the Army to seek a livelihood south of Fort Macleod. But, though his military service had ceased, his interest in all wearers of the Queen's uniform was as bright as ever. He kept open house for all ranks of the Police and it was an understood thing that any redcoat passing that way, on duty or otherwise, was to stop off at Colonel Stern's ranch. As the place stood on the edge of the reserve wherein Wild Horse was lurking, Hector headed for Colonel Stern's as a matter of course.

The Colonel—tall, gray-headed, hook-nosed, weather-beaten, with bushy brows, a heavy military moustache and eyes like rapiers—met them at the door as they loped into the yard at dusk, smiling a welcome and holding out his hand.

"And how are you, Sergeant?" he asked. "Looking like a young stallion, as usual. I'm not going to ask what brings you here, because that's none of my business."

Hector took him aside, nevertheless, and explained.

"I see," the Colonel commented. "Well, it's too late to catch him tonight, Adair. He'd surely get away in the dark. Besides, there's a storm coming up. It will be a wet night—no night for lying in the open. Catch 'em at dawn—that's sound tactics. They won't be stirring then, especially with the rain coming down, and you can take the whole camp by surprise. Come along—supper now, stay here tonight and you'll be fit for anything in the morning."

It was raining, as the Colonel had prophesied, when they turned out, a thin, penetrating, all-day drizzle, and the sky, just lightening, was heavy with an unbroken pall of dense

grey cloud. Such weather, all in all, was admirable for their purpose. Half an hour's careful scouting brought them within sight of the teepees they sought—a ghostly group in the wet desolation. The question was—in which lodge was Wild Horse?

At this moment, they found an Indian boy, who willingly pointed out the teepee occupied by The Gopher, headman of the band. In order to comply with the custom of the Police it was necessary that Hector should inform The Gopher of his intentions.

The Gopher was instantly at the door when Hector sent the small boy into the teepee to awaken him. Speaking the Indian's own tongue, Hector rapidly explained his mission and was relieved to find that the Gopher, far from offering any objection, took the matter philosophically and himself pointed out the lodge in which Wild Horse was hiding.

“Keep everyone in their teepees,” Hector went on, “until we go. Then there will be small likelihood of trouble.”

The Gopher agreed. Hector ordered the constable with the horses up to a position close to Wild Horse's lodge. The others he placed one on each side, ready to seize the murderer should he attempt escape by crawling under the flap. For the last time, obedient to one of the greatest principles of the Mounted Police, he cautioned the men on no account to draw their revolvers. Then, removing his great-coat, he boldly entered the teepee alone.

For a moment unable to see anything, he shortly became aware of the presence of at least a dozen Indians, who sat up in their blankets and stared at him anxiously.

“What do you want?” one of them asked, bristling defiance.

Hector pushed back the door of the lodge still further. The cold light, streaming in, clearly revealed his uniform.

“I have come for Wild Horse,” he answered.

The wanted Indian glared shiftily at the speaker over the edge of his blanket.

“You hear me, Wild Horse?” Hector queried. “I say I have come for you. You know what that means. I am waiting.”

"I will not come," answered Wild Horse.

"What do you mean?" said Hector sternly.

The Indians had learned to dread that tone. They stirred uneasily.

"I will not come!" repeated Wild Horse.

The others broke into a loud murmur of applause. Some of the bolder threw off their blankets and reached for their rifles. Hector caught the sound of angry voices at his back. A hostile crowd was gathering outside. The Gopher had failed, either through weakness or treachery, to maintain control. Hector remembered that they were only four white men among at least a hundred Indians. The least misstep, lack of tact or wavering in courage, might have fatal consequences.

He fixed the murderer with penetrating eyes.

"I say that you are to come," he said. "Do not look so at me—I will not have it. And do not attempt to resist or it will be the worse for you."

In reply, Wild Horse bounded suddenly to his feet, a knife in his hand. The other Indians, muttering fierce threats, stood up behind him. A row of levelled rifles confronted Hector.

"Get out of this lodge!" said Wild Horse.

Instantly Hector closed. A wrench twisted the knife from the Indian's hand. Seizing him, he exerted a supreme effort of his great strength, whirled him off his feet and threw him bodily out of the lodge. Before the murderer's friends could pull a trigger, Hector was also outside.

But it was 'out of the frying-pan into the fire.'

A crowd apparently representing every grown man in camp, to say nothing of women and boys, was thickly clustered round the teepee. The men were all armed and many of them were actually covering the two constables.

One glance revealed all this to Hector; another, that Wild Horse had been promptly and efficiently handcuffed by his men, who held the murderer between them.

What now?

"Take him out of this," Hector ordered coolly. To the crowding Indians, he gave the stern command, "Stand back!"

They answered with a wild yell and one overwhelming rush.

In the furious struggle that resulted, only the intervening bodies of the nearest Indians prevented the policemen from being shot. To hang on to Wild Horse and to beat their assailants off without drawing a weapon—these two thoughts occupied Hector's mind exclusively. He could trust his men—through it all, they clung to Wild Horse like grim death. Meanwhile, all three were knocked down a dozen times, trampled on, beaten with rifles, bitten, throttled, kicked. When opportunity offered, Hector gathered his failing breath and bellowed for The Gopher.

"Give us Wild Horse!" yelled the Indians, pulling and dragging at the policemen. "Let him go!"

"He is our prisoner," answered Hector. "Where is The Gopher?"

So, like a football scrum, the three undaunted redcoats carried the crowd with them to the horses. The mob raved on. The crash of their carbines pierced the uproar.

"Put up your gun, will you!" Hector bawled, as the constable in charge of the horses, a young fellow and inexperienced, drew his revolver.

Then suddenly, at this crisis, came comparative quiet and The Gopher pushed his way forward.

"Where have you been?" Hector demanded. "What do you mean by allowing this to go on?"

The Gopher pretended not to hear. Instead, he bent his energies towards quelling the riot. Presently Hector found himself beside his horses, the prisoner and escort with him, the crowd, visibly subdued, falling back with lowered rifles and the shamefaced Gopher at his side.

"They know they've done a serious thing," Hector thought.

His troubles were obviously over. What plain men call sheer 'guts' had carried the day, as they so often do—as, with savages, they always do.

Hector struck while the iron was hot.

"Now that you have recovered your senses," he said to the hangdog assembly, "I have a word to say to you. You have committed a grave crime. You have tried to stop the

arrest of one of your number by a Mounted Policeman. That is wrong, as you know. And it is also quite useless. You see that we are not afraid of you. When the Mounted Police come for any man, white or red, he has got to come, and we will see that he does come, let a thousand rifles come between. Wild Horse will get a fair trial, you know that. As for you," here he turned to The Gopher, who hung his head, "you have disgraced yourself. Instead of helping us with your authority, you stood aside. The Mounted Police have always treated you well—and this is how you repay us! You are unworthy of your trust. Is it not so?"

"It is so," The Gopher muttered sullenly.

"If you have any explanation to make, you must come to Fort Macleod. And let us have no more of this because, I tell you again, when the Mounted Police come for any man, he has got to come and it is no use resisting."

A moment later, with Wild Horse between them, Hector and his little party rode slowly out of the camp. In recognition of their superior authority, courage and determination, the Indians fell back before them as they passed, lowering their rifles with a gesture that was a salute.

IV

On the night following the lodgment of Wild Horse in the cells at Fort Macleod, Hector was called hurriedly to Inspector Denton's quarters.

Three men occupied the Inspector's parlour when Hector got there—Wild Horse, Martin and Denton himself. The air was tense with drama and breathed secrecy. The windows had been carefully screened and the key-hole blocked with paper, measures insisted on by Wild Horse, who was in deadly fear of spies or eavesdroppers. The lamp had also been turned down and placed out of the direct line of the windows. The dim light remaining fell on the faces of the men around the table with an unearthly glow. All in all, the place might well have been a noisome den devoted

to the most fearful crimes and its occupants conspirators of the deepest dye.

"That you, Adair?" The reassuring voice of the Inspector greeted Hector. "Right. This may be a—er—long business, so you'd better sit down. Now, Martin, tell him to go ahead—slowly. I can understand him myself then."

"What have you to say?" demanded Martin, using the Indian's own language and speaking with the severity he always adopted toward redskin criminals.

Wild Horse glanced fearfully round the room and finally broke silence in a voice little louder than a whisper. He spoke very rapidly. The Inspector attempted to stem the tide with an indignant "Go slow! Dash it, go slow!" but the Indian paid no heed and even Martin raised a hand to silence his superior. Wild Horse ceased at last.

"Well, what's he say?" the Inspector enquired.

"He want to know," Martin replied, "if he tell all trut', we no' string him up. He want to know, if he give way man who got him shoot Chester, we save him from that man. We promise and he say he talk. We no promise, then he no talk."

The Inspector entered into a long explanation of the laws governing evidence and trial, admonishing Wild Horse, for his own good, to talk.

Followed a vehement discussion between Martin and the murderer, which Martin finally boiled down to one brief statement:

"He no' like talk. He ver' much afraid white man."

"Tell him the whole Force will protect him if necessary."

More vehement discussion; then Martin said:

"Good! He talk."

Bit by bit, with many frightened starts and pauses, Wild Horse unfolded the truth. Thanks to the hesitating manner of the telling, Hector followed it with comparative ease, first with interest, then with incredulity, rising step by step to understanding, conviction and certainty. Here was new light on dark places, here, in a few moments, the perplexities of years were made plain.

Said Wild Horse:

"I did kill the pony-soldier found dead in the ravine last spring. But I was bribed to do it by a white man; and I was mad with fire-water. This white man, he used often to give me that poison. He knew I had broken the law several times and would never dare to betray him, so he gave it me without fear, not only for myself but for others. I would carry it into camp in all sorts of ways—many gallons of it. We would pay him for it with buffalo-robbs and other pelts, even with stolen horses and cattle. He never gave the whiskey to anyone but me, as far as I know. He made sure that he would not be betrayed in that manner. He is cunning as a wolf. And I have made him rich.

"Well, one day he sent for me and gave me a lot of fire-water and he told me he would give me lots more if I would do something for him. And he added, if I would not it would be the worse for me. So I said I would obey him, because I was afraid. Then he told me I must kill this man, the Sergeant here."

And Wild Horse pointed straight at Hector.

"I knew the Sergeant—have often seen him. I was afraid, so I said I would do it. I went to the herd-camp and hid all day under a tarpaulin. Just before the Police moved on to a new place, I heard the Sergeant tell one of the men he would go with them and come back later alone. So, when the Police were not looking, I crept out and hid in a good place near the trail. I waited till nearly dark. Then I saw a man coming along. I thought it was the Sergeant. Had he not said he was coming back alone? Besides, I could not see his face at that hour. I shot him dead. When I looked at him, I saw my mistake. But I put him on his horse and led him away; and the rest you know. Then I returned to my lodge. I wanted to hide in some other part of the country but I knew that if you found me absent you would suspect me. So I stayed there. The chinook wiped out all traces, so I had nothing to fear from that. And you did not suspect me.

"I thought it was all forgotten. Then you came and arrested Bear Sitting Down and the rest. That made me afraid. I had foolishly told Bear Sitting Down what I had

done, while still drunk, and I thought you had arrested him because of that and I feared he would betray me. So I ran away. When I thought it was safe I came back. And then the Sergeant came himself and took me. That is all. I would not have killed the young man if I had not been drunk and mad for more fire-water and in the power of that bad white man. I swear that is true. Now go you and arrest him. He——”

“Yes?” said Martin, encouragingly. “Who is he?”

Wild Horse described his master.

“It’s Welland!” Hector exclaimed, “Joe Welland!”

v

There was no question of it. The man who had bribed Wild Horse to attempt Hector’s murder was Welland.

“Why, it’s impossible!” Inspector Denton declared, when Hector explained. “Welland? He’s one of the—ah—wealthiest, most influential, most respected men in the country. He would have no object——”

Hector shook his head. The time had come for him to unmask the man he had long suspected but against whom he had hitherto been unable to amass enough evidence. Wild Horse had pieced the puzzle together for him.

“I’ll tell you what I think of Joe Welland, sir!” he said tersely. “He’s the biggest horse-thief, cattle-rustler and whiskey-smuggler this side the boundary. Yes, sir,” as the Inspector voiced a mild protest, “that’s so. Oh, I’ve suspected him for a long, long time. We’ve tried to clear the district of those crimes, sir, and made some progress, too; and yet can’t completely stop it. Well, sir, some time ago it struck me that the reason why we weren’t able to stamp out the business was that it was being run from a central headquarters. This headquarters kept itself well informed of our movements, so that it could direct operations with the best chances of success. It kept itself well informed, with the result that, capture as many of its tools as we please, we could never nab the men on top. This pointed to careful organization, employing men over whom it had a

definite hold only and letting those men into no matter that did not directly concern them. The small men had no idea of the scope of the gang employing them, nor, in fact, any knowledge of the chief men, to say nothing of their own comrades. Each was just a cog in the machine, doing the little job assigned them. When arrested, they gave no evidence of value because they hadn't any. So we just jailed them as men convicted of a small share in the big game and went on working in the dark as before."

"That sounds plausible," the Inspector asserted, a little doubtfully "But—er—what about Welland?"

"Why, sir,"—Hector was aflame now with the conviction that they were on the verge of a big thing—"we know how easily Welland became wealthy, apparently without effort. All sorts of evidence, too small to arrest him on but still damning, gradually brought me to suspect him. His herds of horses—new buildings—lands—where did they come from? The horses and cattle were stolen by gangs of Indians and whites, who did not know they were working under that man but simply delivered them to men who in turn handed them over to him—men in his power. Selling these herds, he made money. But the greater amount by far was made from the sale of robes, horses and cattle received in exchange for whiskey run into the country by his organization. That's how he got wealthy, I'm certain of it now. I could tell you a thousand little things that show why I suspect him, sir, but it would take a long time. Meanwhile——"

"Well, meanwhile—what?"

"We have evidence enough from this Indian, sir. Welland bribed him to shoot me. Why? Because I've been too hot on the trail of his whiskey-runners for the past few years! He was afraid I might get *too* near soon, so he thought he'd better put me out of the way first. What more easy than to have this done by an Indian in his power—an Indian who wouldn't dare to give him away if caught? That's why he picked Wild Horse. If Wild Horse hadn't made a mistake, I'd be dead now—and my suspicions with me!

Look at the evidence we've against him, from Wild Horse alone, sir!"

The Inspector pondered.

"Er—about this idea that he was out to finish you, Adair. And—ah—about this organization of which he's the—ah—chief. Can you give me an example of the sort of thing that made you suspicious?"

Hector was ready for this.

"Yes, I can, sir. You remember when I settled that whiskey story and—well, dealt with Randall, the man who started it?"

A flicker of a smile played over the Inspector's face.

"Yes, I do," he replied.

"Well, it comes to me now that that was started to discredit me—perhaps to make you think I wasn't to be trusted, sir, and get you to take me off the whiskey-runners altogether. If Welland is what I think he is, that's just what he'd do. Now, Welland was the only man except Randall who knew that whiskey had been shipped to me. If he had power over Randall, he could make him circulate those yarns and take the blame later. Finding that the scheme wouldn't work, he next thinks of putting me out for good by getting Wild Horse to shoot me. I'm certain if we get Randall here now, sir, and tell him we know part of the truth and want the rest, he'll give it to us. Being in Welland's power, as I believe, he'll welcome a chance to knife him. Besides, he's a coward, and will think more of saving his own skin than of anything else."

The Inspector was slowly but surely marshalling the facts and was almost finally convinced.

"That's an idea, too," he declared. "But Welland's always been a good friend of ours, Adair. He's—ah—respected everywhere and——"

"He's made a fortune out of that sham respectability, sir," Hector said. "His friendship was carefully planned from the time we first came in—I'm sure of that now. He was probably whiskey-trading as a side-line when we arrived and, instead of really welcoming us, he hated to see us come. After that he could only carry on with safety by

doing it secretly, while he played the friendly respectable on the surface. That tune went down well with the decent people in the country; and how were newcomers like ourselves to know him for what he really was? The only man who could possibly succeed at the head of the organization I've described, sir, was a man we all considered respectable—I saw that when I first became suspicious that such an organization actually existed. Welland is thought to be one of the most respectable in the country, as you've said—and tonight what Wild Horse has said leaves me absolutely convinced."

The Inspector looked Hector in the eyes.

"I believe you're right!" he said. "Send out for Randall."

VI

Hector's estimate of Randall proved absolutely correct. He told them all he knew.

"Ya've caught me with the goods, I guess," he said, nervously twisting his big hands and rolling his bloodshot eyes, "so I may's well 'fess up. But for God's sake, don't give me away to Welland. That feller, he's a hound o' hell, Mr. Denton. He beats that there squaw o' his——"

"Beats his squaw, Randall?" queried the Inspector, astonished.

"Yessir, beats the hide off'n her. There ain't many knows that but I know it—blast him! An' he's——"

"That'll do. Get on with your story," the Inspector said.

"Well, sir, he come to me an' he says, 'You got to start a story against Adair,' he says. 'He's been interferin' a sight too much in my business lately—' Hector flashed a triumphant look to the Inspector, a look that plainly said 'I told you so!'—'an' I want him broke. I want him ruined!' he says. 'That case o' whiskey,' he says, 'that gives us what we want.' Then he tells me I gotta tell everyone Sergeant Adair was as bad a whiskey-runner as any in the North-West, that he was gettin' whiskey up reg'lar from th' East—you know all about it, Sergeant! I wouldn't 'a' done it, I wouldn't,

Sergeant, that's straight—but that human devil, he made me."

"He's got you, *too*, eh?" the Inspector interjected. "What had you done, Randall—theft or murder?"

"Eh? Eh?" Randall jerked, jaw dropping.

The shaft had struck him fair and square.

"It wasn't anythin' like that, Mr. Denton, I swear. That's—"

"Look here," the Inspector rapped. "You're lying! You'll deny you've traded whiskey for him next!"

"Whiskey?" Randall's face was ghastly. "Mr. Denton, for God's sake——"

"I knew it!" the Inspector exclaimed remorselessly. "Hand in glove with that Indian there, too, I'll bet!"

Wild Horse jumped uneasily. Randall cast a frightened glance in that direction.

"Ah, Inspector," he cried, desperately. "No—I never seen that feller before. That's Gospel true! I'll admit I smuggled whiskey, but——"

Hector cut him short.

"You see, sir," he said to Denton, "he's one of the minor cogs in the machine. Wild Horse is another. Both work under Welland—neither knows the other from Adam!"

The Inspector nodded.

"Tell us what happened after your scandal-mongering failed," he ordered.

Randall hesitated—then made the plunge.

"Well, sir, 't was like this. Welland come to me one Sunday, 'bout three weeks after Sergeant Adair treated me so rough. He reckoned the game had failed. Sergeant Adair was still workin' on the whiskey business and was more of a hero than ever. Welland was rip-snortin' mad—said he'd like to have Adair shot. 'Adair ain't done nothin' to shoot him for,' I says. 'Oh, hasn't he?' says Welland, 'He's done more'n you think. Always pokin' his nose into other people's affairs.' That's all he said an' he never mentioned Adair ag'in. He never said nothin' to me 'bout usin' Wild Horse to shoot the Sergeant. I never knowd nothin' 'bout that."

"All right, Randall. We'll believe you," said the Inspec-

tor. "At any rate, Adair, he confirms Wild Horse's statement to this extent—that Welland actually threatened to settle you. After the whiskey fiasco, he thought—ah—murder a better scheme than any. Taking all the evidence, Adair, we've got about enough to give him—ah—at least ten years. Frankly, I—ah—think you've landed the biggest fish and—er—uncovered the biggest thing you've come across since the Force started. This will cause a sensation! And—er—if you bring him in and he's found guilty, I—ah—shouldn't be at all surprised if it meant—ah—promotion. In the meantime, we must collar him as quickly as possible. Think you'd better try the arrest? It might be—ah—rather risky, for *you!*"

"That's just why I want to do it, sir!" Hector declared, with all the emphasis possible. "This is a personal fight between Welland and myself. He's made it so; and I must see it through. Besides, he's my meat, anyway. I trailed him. I showed him up. I must see it through. And I'd rather do it single-handed, sir, if you don't mind."

The Inspector leisurely filled his pipe.

"I—er—appreciate your viewpoint, Sergeant," he said at last. "By George, if any one should arrest him, it's you! Where is he?"

"At home," Randall interrupted. "I know, 'cos he went back there yesterday."

"Right. Handle it your own way, Adair. You'd better start at once, though there's no particular hurry. You're sure to catch him by surprise. But do as you please. It's your hand."

"I won't leave anything to chance, sir," replied Hector. "I'll start *now*."

"Right." The Inspector lighted his pipe at the lamp. "I'll expect him within twenty-four hours. And, oh—as you pass the guard-room, tell 'em to send over an escort for two prisoners. What's that, Randall? Why, of *course* you're going behind the bars, too, my good man. You surely don't imagine—Good luck—ah—to you, Adair."

"Thank you, sir."

Hector saluted and was gone.

The Inspector had said there was 'no particular hurry.' Hector himself believed that there was 'no particular hurry.' Both were lamentably wrong.

One of Welland's spies had overheard every syllable of the discussion in the Inspector's parlour and, before Hector had saddled up, had left Fort Macleod two good miles behind and was galloping hot-foot for Welland's to warn him of his danger.

VII

On clearing the barracks and turning his horse into the trail to Welland's ranch, sixty miles distant, Hector saw that the moon was rising among the scattered clouds above the distant foothills, and he studied his watch by its radiance: eight o'clock exactly. He planned to reach Welland's before dawn. Setting a brisk pace, if all went well, he should have his enemy under arrest within six or seven hours. The trail was so clearly revealed that he could safely proceed at almost any speed. He settled down for the long ride.

As he went, he found himself unable to put out of his mind the night's startling revelations. Having long suspected Welland of whiskey-smuggling, horse-stealing and cattle-rustling, confirmation of these suspicions caused him no surprise. But that Welland had plotted his disgrace and afterwards his death came home with unexpected force. He saw now that, from the time when they first met, until that moment, Welland's feelings towards him were nothing but sham, maintained for purposes of his own. Welland had recognized him long ago as a man who would probably become dangerous and had gone out of his way from the first to hoodwink him—to produce in Hector's mind an impression strongly favourable to himself. As with Hector, so with the Force generally, to a lesser degree, and so also with the civilians of the district. To discover that Welland's friendship had always been false, that, while apparently well disposed toward him, the rancher had long been plotting against him and had actually attempted to murder him—this was a very bitter pill.

Running over various incidents, Hector, now that his eyes had been opened, could see traces of Welland's deceit everywhere. The warmth with which he had condemned all evil-doers and especially all whiskey-traders when he first came to Fort Macleod had been nothing but hypocrisy, to blind them to his own misdoings. The energy with which he had worked to make their first Christmas a success had been born, not of generous good feeling, but a selfish desire to increase his own popularity with the Force and thus lend further concealment to his real character. He had pushed Hector into prominence on that occasion simply to strengthen the latter's good opinion. The interest he had always shown in Hector's work—as when he enquired so tenderly after the progress he was making with the whiskey-runners when they met in Weatherton's store—that, too, was a sham, an attempt to win useful information. One by one, Hector took these things from their dusty pigeon-holes, examined them in this new light and added them to the damning evidence he had collected against Welland.

So much for that friendship!

Other matters came back to him, bits of evidence of which he had just hinted to Inspector Denton. There was, for instance, the fright displayed by Welland when the party of Police arrived unexpectedly at his house on the way to 'Red-hot' Dan's and asked for shelter. The rancher had been so startled that one might have almost fancied him anticipating arrest. And later, when he endeavored to scare them with wonderful stories of the desperate character of the wanted man—what was this but a sign that he was in league with the trader and desired to gain time to warn him and secure his escape into U. S. territory, while the Police returned to Fort Macleod for reinforcements? They had found 'Red-hot' Dan ready for them, even as it was, and Hector suspected, now, that Welland had obtained means at least to warn him in time to put up a resistance. Hector remembered the shrieks he had heard on the way to the Sun Dance and knew that Randall's tale of Welland beating his squaw was true. It was then that Welland had shown him the buffalo skull used by the smugglers—an effort, that, to put

him off the scent. The man had been cunning as the devil; but not cunning enough. These things, together, betrayed him at last as a liar, a traitor, a brute, an arch-criminal.

And it was with this man—no petty law-breaker but a foe-man worthy of his steel—that Hector had his quarrel. He was almost glad that such a man had chosen him as a special enemy, had in fact forced him to take up as a personal fight what otherwise would have been only a matter of duty. He leaped to meet the challenge. ‘This is a personal fight between Welland and myself,’ he had told the Inspector. ‘He’s made it so; and I must see it through. Besides, he’s my meat, anyway. I trailed him. I showed him up. I must see it through. And I’d rather do it single-handed. . . .’ The words came back to him as he rushed through the night and he looked forward, keen as mustard, to the moment which should bring them face to face, in the struggle which had been approaching year after year and was now at hand. . . .

He was so absorbed in these pleasant anticipations that, in spite of the bright moonlight, he failed to notice a hole in the trail. His horse, half asleep, though cantering, was as blind as himself. Somersaulting heels over head, horse and rider fell. The horse stumbled wildly to its feet. But Hector lay stunned.

And the spy ahead went galloping on.

VIII

At three o’clock in the morning Joe Welland woke from a sweet dream to find his squaw beside him. On the arrest of Wild Horse, he had sent Lizzie to Fort Macleod to watch and report developments. Her return was now sufficient evidence to tell him that something momentous had happened.

A horrible fear swept over him and, sitting up in bed, he frantically ordered her to speak.

In her halting English, Lizzie obeyed. Long a familiar and pathetic figure in barracks, no-one had suspected her and she had been able to maintain a close watch on Wild Horse’s prison. When she saw him brought to Inspector Denton’s

quarters, she guessed that vital developments would follow. Going round to the Inspector's kitchen, she begged for food. Mrs. Denton knew her quite well and thought her harmless. She gave her a seat in the kitchen and a bite of supper. Lizzie, when left for a moment alone, slipped into a hiding-place under the stairs, whence she overheard everything going on in the parlour. As soon as she learned that Sergeant Adair was to start for Welland's, she escaped from barracks unobserved, mounted her pony, which was tethered in a gully not far off, and had ridden over the sixty miles at the best speed possible.

Then she gave the rancher full details of the conference.

It was typical of Welland that he had no word of thanks for the woman who had dared and endured so much for his sake. Day in and day out, through the years, he had used her as a slave, working her to exhaustion and often flogging her. Yet, with the dumb devotion characteristic of the Indian woman, she had borne it all, content to suffer his injustice if only she might dedicate her life to him. And now, in his great need, when she might have left him to the fate he well deserved, when circumstances had offered her an opportunity for retribution, she had unhesitatingly done her best to save his wretched hide. Years of selfish brutality had made him incapable of gratitude for the greatest of services, and he would have regarded the sacrifice of her life for him as a matter of course.

It did not take him long to see that flight was his only refuge. His day was done. The Police—represented, in his view, by Hector—had at last unmasked him, had gathered conclusive evidence against him and were at that very moment on their way to take him. When they had him safely in jail, he realized, they would set about gathering more information. With the Chester murder against him, it would be at least a life sentence. To attempt to bluff it out was madness. If the Police laid hands on him, he was doomed. The United States boundary was only a few miles away. Once on American soil, he could quickly hide himself so that not even the Yankees could find him. After that, he could begin life over again somewhere. This life, the life of Mr.

Joseph Welland, rancher—had crumbled to pieces round him and only instant action could save him from burial in the ruins.

A man of quick decisions, his mind was at once made up. Jumping out of bed, he began to dress, throwing instructions at Lizzie the while.

“And don’t make a noise, or I’ll kill you,” he adjured.

Fear lent him swiftness and strength. Already, he fancied he heard Hector’s voice, summoning him to surrender. Hector! At thought of him, Welland was possessed with fury. To Hector, he knew, he owed his downfall. With infinite patience and cunning, beginning years before Hector’s arrival, the rancher had built up a criminal machine of amazing efficiency, a machine which had made him rich. He had hidden his own connection with the machine so cleverly that, as time went on, he began to consider himself absolutely safe. One by one his vassals were jailed but no evil consequences for himself resulted. He had taken good care, from the first, to see that they were men who knew it best to keep their mouths shut. So, to all the world, he had continued to be Joseph Welland, most respectable of ranchers. The world might have lingered on in this illusion for Heaven knows how long, at least until the day when, made wealthy by the machine, he might have scrapped it and become truly respectable. That day, of late, had seemed near; and he looked forward to it, since, to do him justice, he was not a master-criminal for the love of it nor a secret associate with low-down whites and Indians for any love he bore them. That day had seemed near; and now, thanks to Hector, it was gone forever.

It was no satisfaction to him at this moment to recall that from the first he had recognized the quiet, immensely keen young giant as a dangerous factor. But the knowledge that he had been unable to maintain Hector in ignorance of his real character, that he had failed to realize until too late that Hector was on his track, and that, when realization came, he had made so poor a job of his attempt to ‘settle’ him—this knowledge tortured him.

Well, he would see to it that he was not taken by Ser-

geant Adair or any other Mounted Policeman! If he hurried, he might still get away to such a start that no-one could overtake him. But he must hurry. Hector could not have been far behind Lizzie in leaving Fort Macleod.

The black horse stolen from 'Lazy G' was the best in the stable! He ran out into the moonlight to saddle him.

IX

Hector's struggling return to consciousness ended when he felt something soft and warm against his hand and found his horse anxiously nuzzling him. For a minute or two he was powerless to think or move. The moon and stars went wheeling weirdly round and round, while a sticky stream coursed slowly down his cheek. Feeling horribly sick and weak, he yielded to an intense desire to sleep and closed his eyes again.

Meanwhile, precious time was flying.

From this condition he recovered with a start and a dawning sense that something important was hanging in the balance. His next thought was to get to his feet; but, when he tried to rise, agonizing pains shot through him, dragging a groan from his lips and forcing beads of sweat to his face. He sat up gasping, teeth clenched. The spasm past, he tried again, got to his knees, then, catching at the stirrup, dragged himself slowly up and so at last to a standing position. Had he not had the saddle to cling to, he would certainly have fallen. As it was, he reeled drunkenly and only the dim knowledge that he *must* pull himself together gave him the power to hold on.

So, as he hung there, everything came back to him. He remembered that he was on the trail to Welland's to arrest the rancher. Then he saw that the saddle was twisted to one side and the oak cantle broken. The horse, too, was cut and grimy about the knees and blood had dried in its nostrils. Next he realized that his tunic had been ripped up the back and was hanging in shreds. His hat was gone, his face covered with dirt, the clammy streams on his cheeks were blood, flowing from wounds in his forehead. Then he recollected

the fall. The horse had apparently put its forefoot in a hole and turned a somersault. In the fall, pinned beneath the horse, he had been torn along the ground. Gradually he realized that had he not been exceptionally strong, he would have been killed by the fall, in which he had been dragged twenty feet.

As things were he was in no condition to go on. Even the iron code of the Mounted Police had no quarrel with a man who yielded when in such a state as Hector found himself. But his first thought was for the business in hand. The moon was going down. His watch had stopped at three o'clock. Then probably he had lain there hours afterwards. In desperate haste, he set about making up for lost time.

The whole secret of his reputation was revealed in that crisis.

He was sick and sore and his brain was whirling like a top. Yet somehow he twisted the saddle back into its rightful position, thanking God that his horse had remained faithfully beside him throughout, thus enabling him to complete his journey on horseback instead of on foot. Then he got somehow into the saddle, somehow started the horse and so, the reins twisted round his hands, while his fingers clung to the mane and he held on from hip to heel, urged gradually into a steady gallop.

"Am I in time? Am I in time?"

Drumming in his head with the beat of hoofs, that was the only thought he could retain.

The rest of the ride was sheer torture, without dimensions of time or distance. The road staggered under him, the horse rocked, the moon, now almost out, did idiotic things. Every shooting pain, every bump, went through him with terrible violence, his desire to end this agony and get to grips with Welland became a consuming fire.

"Am I in time? Am I in time?"

More dead than alive, he pounded into Welland's yard at last. Dawn was gilding the mountains. The shack showed only one feeble light. In a daze, biting back the cry of torment beating at his lips, he slid to the ground.

Now!

He opened the door cautiously. From Welland's bed-room, the light burned dimly. Hector entered.

At the entrance to the room, he found confusion everywhere. A dark form crouched, moaning, in a corner. She looked up at him—Lizzie! The sight gave him a nasty shock, for he fancied her at Fort Macleod.

Suddenly possessed of a vague uneasiness, he strode quickly in. Welland, acting on some strange freak, had left a message for him under the lamp on the table. He snatched it up and read:

"You have won this time. But I will win yet. I owe you my ruin and, if it takes me twenty years, I'll get even. Remember, I'll get even, if it takes me twenty years."

The threat was lost on Hector—at any other time he would have laughed at it. But now he turned swiftly to Lizzie.

"Where is Joe?" he demanded.

Surely, surely Welland had not escaped him, after all that had passed?

"Where is Joe?" he repeated fiercely.

Lizzie laughed in mad triumph.

"He gone—hour ago! You no' catch him. He over the medicine-line!"

Hector rapped an inward oath of agony. White man—ghastly in the lamp-light, with pale, bloody face, and tattered scarlet—and Indian, they stared at each other.

BOOK TWO: *Spirit-of-Iron*

BOOK TWO: *Spirit-of-Iron*

Chapter I

I

Until comparatively recently, the destinies of nations depended mainly upon roads. A nation might be judged by the state of its roads. Civilization and Progress moved along good roads, bad roads were the symbols of Barbarism. Rome, the Imperial power of the ancient world, the greatest apostle of Civilization and Progress born before the Renaissance, built the best roads ever made.

For the past century the railway has been to nations and Empires what the road once was.

Western Canada, marching under the wing of the Mounted Police, had by this time emerged from barbarism. A decade of strong government had done its work. Homesteads dotted the vastness of the plains, small islands in wide seas of grass. Little towns were rising up like magic at the forks of the long, lone trails. The country was slowly waking, like a young giant, from the sleep of untold centuries, awakening to a vague yet definite conception of its destiny. Faintly visioning its mighty future, it carefully took the measure of itself and looked around for what it lacked to fill its deficiencies. Where one homestead stood it knew there should be a hundred. Where little shack-towns rose, it knew there should be cities. The future held its promise of these things. But until the country's crying need was filled, the future remained a promise—nothing more.

The country's crying need—what was it?

The railway.

And the railway was coming now. From Atlantic to

Pacific, one poem with an heroic theme was in the making—the epic of the Transcontinental.

To the East, in this epic, belong the giants of vision, the planners, the intellectuals. The West saw only the men of action, the giants who did the bidding of the fathers of the dream, the surveyors, plate-layers, navvies, engineers. These men of action were organized like an army. Like an army, they had their officers, their N. C. O.s, their rank and file, their hangers-on and camp-followers. The men who supervised—the construction-bosses, skilled engineers, managers of one thing or another—were the officers; the foremen and master-mechanics were the N. C. O.s; the lesser labourers—mostly called Dagoes—who laid the road-bed, dug ditches, carried sleepers, rails and fish-plates—were the rank and file; while the camp-followers and hangers-on—gamblers, whiskey-smugglers, robbers, cut-throats and lost women—were scum clean through.

Though organized like an army—these people—they were actually a crowd. An army is distinguished from a crowd by its discipline. And they had very little discipline. It was necessary, for the good of the great work, that their unruly elements be kept in hand. As far as such men could be, they were kept in hand. And, through their labours—this fact will help them at the Day of Judgment—the great work marched steadily towards completion. Slowly but surely, the thin thread of steel pushed its way through the trackless wastes of rock and burnt-out timber north of the Great Lakes; thrust itself across mile after mile of sunlit plain; climbed step by step over the foothills and into the mountains; clambered along sheer precipices, sprang over dizzy gorges, bored through vast walls of granite; and, tracing always the pathway of the pioneers, pushed forward month by month in the wake of the setting sun.

The crowd was kept in hand—partly by the iron rule of its chiefs but mainly through the unceasing vigilance of the Mounted Police, who soothed their discontent, caught their robbers, suppressed their gamblers, baffled their whiskey-smugglers and forestalled their murderers.

The 'end of track,' by this time, had reached Regina; and

Hector was the senior N. C. O. of the Mounted Police on that division.

When Sergeant-Major Whittaker, six months before, had left the Force to take up land in the North, his departure had left a great gap in J Division; but nobody had been surprised when Hector was called upon to fill it.

"He's one of our best N. C. O.s," was the general comment. "Besides, he has the luck of the devil, anyway!"

So Hector was now Sergeant-Major, at twenty-eight, and it was more than probable that before he was thirty he would easily realize his dream of a commission. There was no cloud on his horizon. He was very happy.

For some time after Welland's escape Hector had feared for his prospects. A criminal involved in innumerable crimes had slipped through his fingers; he thought the Big Chiefs would consider this inexcusable. Hector's fall, which to some minds might have exonerated him, seemed to him to add to the disgrace. The result of sheer carelessness—so he considered it—that fall should never have happened to a Mounted Policeman; and he was certain the Big Chiefs would hold the same opinion. But when the Commissioner and Inspector Denton heard the details of his condition when, ragged, gory, white-faced and held up only by his indomitable will, he returned from Welland's, and realized just what he had done, they acted as they thought best. Hector, after all, had unmasked the man—one of the most dangerous in the country—and at least driven him out by his own unaided effort. It was good riddance of bad rubbish; and Welland's escape did him no harm.

That was two years ago now and Hector had almost forgotten the whole affair. Even Welland's dramatic little note, with its vindictive threat, 'I'll get even, if it takes me twenty years' he had contemptuously banished from his mind. And today he was Sergeant-Major of J Division, maintaining the law along one hundred miles of the line of construction.

The job carried very heavy responsibilities, which aged him daily—not physically but mentally. He had, where duty was concerned, the outlook of a man twice his age. He was

the connecting-link between officers and men, his task to see that every order and regulation was obeyed. Besides these matters concerning the internal economy of the Force, he had also to deal direct with law-breakers. So he came in touch with all the vice, wretchedness and stark tragedy abounding in the tent-towns and construction camps. He knew all the thieves, 'rollers,' toughs, shell-game experts, whiskey-peddlers and ladies of doubtful reputation by sight and most of them by name. When the scarlet-coated patrols swooped down on crowded caboose or side-tracked box-car at dead of night to catch the drunks in full carouse, he was almost always in the offing. When a gambling-joint was raided, he led the rush. When, in pauses between dances, the dirty men and painted women at the little tables in the reeking dance-halls became suddenly silent to watch a lone man in uniform pass vigilantly among them, the lone man was generally Hector.

In his turn, through all the seething, howling world whose axis was the railway, his was the most familiar figure. They knew him as the kindest and best-hearted of men to those who slipped through ignorance or foolishness, and, to those who slipped from choice, the most merciless; loved him or hated him, according to their lights; went out of their way to meet him or to avoid him; and feared him, one and all, far more than they feared God.

II

In spite of all his responsibilities and hard work, Hector found opportunities to have a little harmless fun; as witness Mr. Augustus J. Perkins, gambler and whiskey-smuggler, temporarily resident in the mushroom city of Regina.

Hector first spotted Mr. Perkins on the way to Qu'appelle, a few miles down the line, where Sergeant Cranbrook was stationed. His attention was drawn to Mr. Perkins because, firstly, the man's face was unfamiliar, secondly, he was a book-agent. Book-agents were frequently seen along the line and Hector had learned to regard them all with suspicion, as most of them adopted the profession to hide their

true identity, which was generally criminal. And Mr. Perkins' appearance was against him. He was a plump, ruddy, cheery soul and might have passed muster but for his eyes, which were shifty and bloodshot; also, his nose was red. His hands were pudgy, too, and covered with cheap rings. He wore a little bow-tie, a wide-awake hat, a vile flowered waistcoat, a Prince Albert, very baggy trousers and a dazzling gold watch hung with many seals. His face was too good to be true and he studiously kept his eyes away from Hector. These things condemned him.

"I'll try him out," thought Hector.

He approached Mr. Perkins, who greeted him with a convincing smile but was still unable to hide his aversion to Mounted Policemen. Hector noted the fact.

"Nice day," he began, sitting down opposite the book-agent. "Augustus J. Perkins, I presume?"

"Yes." Then, doubtfully, "Le's see now, where'd we meet before?"

"It wasn't in jail, was it?" Hector smiled.

"Quit your jokin'," Mr. Perkins returned, shifting uneasily. "Where was it, though?"

"I don't know. I saw your name on your grip, if that's what you mean?"

"Oh, yas. Yas." Followed a pause, Mr. Perkins evidently searching his whirling brain for something to say. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks. I'll smoke it later, when no-one's around."

The book-agent lighted up.

"How's business?" Hector resumed.

"Pretty good," Mr. Perkins admitted.

"Sold lots of stock?"

"Oh, yas. Yas!"

"I wonder if he's foolin' me?" Perkins was thinking. But Hector was perfectly serious.

"I'm quite fond of reading myself," said Hector. "You've a lot of books there. What have you?"

The book-agent pondered.

"I've got Scott, Thack'r'y, Dickens, an'—Dickens—an'—

le's see; the Waverley Novels, Shakespeare, Pickwick Papers—that's a new book, just out, by—by——"

"Scott, isn't it?" Hector suggested.

"Yas, Scott—tha's right," Mr. Perkins hastily affirmed. "Oh, an' lots more."

"Good, I'd like to see one or two. Fetch down the big bag and let's have a look at it."

The agent reached a hand to the rack, laying hold of a small bag.

Hector did not let the action pass.

"The *big* bag, I said," he reminded the agent pleasantly.

Perkins pretended not to hear.

"The *big* bag," Hector repeated.

"Eh?" Mr. Perkins jerked suddenly.

"I want to see the big bag."

The agent found his voice.

"Hell, that's my stock," he protested. "My samples are in this."

And he pulled the small bag down.

"All right, my buck," Hector thought. "I understand."

They looked over the books together.

"Well, you've a fine stock," Hector asserted, after a time. "Now, I'll tell you where to find me in Regina. Come up there when you're next in town and I'll buy twenty books from you."

"Say, that's real white of you, Mr. Adair. An' I'll be there first chance."

Though he tried thereafter to pump Mr. Perkins, the book-agent would not be drawn. But he was well satisfied.

"A smuggler and probably a gambler," he thought. "He'll never come within a mile of my quarters, of course. That's a certainty. Never mind. We'll land him."

They parted at Qu'appelle. Cranbrook was waiting for Hector, who pulled him under cover and pointed out Mr. Perkins, instructing him to keep an eye on the gambler.

Together, they prepared a combined plan for the downfall of Mr. Perkins.

Returning to Regina that night, Hector delved into certain records and finally unearthed data concerning a gambler

answering closely to the description of the suspect. Moreover, he was nicknamed 'Artful Gussie.'

Hector advised Cranbrook of this discovery and passed word along the whole line setting detachments on their guard.

In one week's time they amassed sufficient evidence to arrest Mr. Perkins, and landed him behind the bars.

III

The Press Association's special train was speeding towards Qu'appelle, its whistle screaming, its noisy little engine pouring out long trails of sparks. From the windows of the cars were thrust serried rows of heads and strings of handkerchiefs. As they neared the little town, one lively young lady, wearing an especially smart hat and a particularly large bustle—her name was Nita Oswald and she represented a leading Eastern paper—gave voice to the sentiments of the company:

"Oh, here's another of these horrible holes! When *are* we going to meet the *real* 'Wild West'? I've seen plenty of picturesque scenery and some lovely cut-throats. But I do want to see something truly romantic. *Please* send us something romantic, O Lord!"

And she rolled her very alluring eyes towards Heaven.

Whereupon, suddenly, the prayer was answered. From the woods fringing either side of the line at some distance, came all at once a startling succession of blood-curdling yells. Everyone became galvanized to attention, with thoughts of Indian attacks and gory massacres. But they had no time to yield to their alarm. The first war-whoop was still echoing through the August woods when out burst two racing lines of horsemen in dazzling scarlet. They dashed across the intervening ground, swung to left or right with thrilling precision and so, at utmost speed, galloped alongside the train.

"Oh, oh!" screamed the young lady with the bustle, "How lovely! A whole army of the Mounted Police!"

The windows of the train grew clamorous, the handkerchiefs fluttered like frantic birds, the engine answered the

continued yells of the flying horsemen with shriek on shriek. A trumpeter at the head of the troop stirred the watchers with a glorious ripple of music and the horse at the tail, wildly enthusiastic, put down its head and tore over the ground with terrific bucks but without lagging a yard behind or disturbing its impassive rider by the breadth of a feather. The gleaming scarlet and steel, the brilliant horsemanship, the dash and movement of the whole picture roused the journalists to mad applause.

This was something like the West and no mistake about it!

At Qu'appelle, a halt was made, and journalists and policemen fraternized. A group of admiring press-men offered respectful congratulations to the tall young Sergeant-Major who had argued with the horse. Attracted by the little crowd, a man on the platform of the nearest car came down and joined it. A moment later the journalists were thrust aside.

"Hector!"

And Hector, wheeling, gave joyous answer:

"Hugh!"

After that, of course, there was nothing for it but that Hector should hand over his horse to one of the men and to return to Regina with Hugh. This was easily arranged; and, while the train rattled on to the 'end of track,' Hector and Hugh enjoyed a splendid chat—the first in ten long years.

There was naturally a tremendous lot to tell, but certain facts stood out. Hugh had been a journalist a long time now—Hector knew this already, having watched his career with a good deal of interest—and when the editor of his paper in Toronto looked for a man to send Westward with the Press Association, his choice had fallen upon Hugh. Why had he kept his coming secret? Oh, he wanted to give Hector a real surprise.

"Well, you've done that, all right," Hector declared. "You're the first man from home I've seen since I came West, Hugh!"

Speaking of home inevitably led to a cross-examination

covering all the latest doings of Hector's mother—Cousin John—Allen—and the others. Hugh, to satisfy Hector's craving, described everything in detail. Then, suddenly, he was struck with an inspiration:

"But look here, Hec'. You've earned a holiday, God knows. Why not come back with me and see it all for yourself? I can't possibly do it justice, you know. Now, Hec'!"

The suggestion brought a light to Hector's eyes. But presently he shook his head.

"I can't, Hugh," he said. "We're up to the neck just now. I can't be spared. Don't argue. There's no-one to take my place."

"Oh, bosh!" laughed Hugh. "You're not so darned important. Of course they can spare you! You've got swelled head, old boy."

Hector rapped him playfully.

"Yes, haven't I?" he replied. "Never mind—it can't be done. No such word as 'can't' in the Police vocabulary? There is, in this case!"

Hugh thereafter exhausted his arguments. Hector was a Gibraltar.

"Oh, tell us—who's your C.O.?" asked Hugh, at last.

"Superintendent Denton. Why?"

"Never mind," said Hugh, abruptly changing the conversation. And Hector forgot the matter.

But, later on that day he was greeted with the dazzling information that Hugh, while Hector was absent a moment on duty, had seen the Superintendent and the latter had consented to allow Hector six weeks' leave.

"Six weeks' leave, Hec'! Six weeks! Think of it! He didn't say a word against it. Said, in fact, he'd been contemplating sending you, as ten years without leave was quite enough for any man. And when I told him you'd refused to ask for it and I was seeing him without your knowledge, he said it was just like you—that you had a wonderful sense of duty! What more can you want? Isn't that great?"

"Hugh!" said Hector.
He was going home!

IV

News of all kinds runs swiftly through organized formations and within an hour every man at headquarters, including the prisoners in the cells, knew that Hector was going East.

While he was putting the finishing touches to his hurried preparations, the Sergeant in charge of the cells came to him.

"Sergeant-Major, can you spare a moment?"

"Well?"

"You know that gambler that's awaiting trial—the fellow Sergeant Cranbrook arrested at Qu'appelle?"

Hector smiled.

"Oh, yes—Perkins. What about him?"

"He's heard you're going home, S.-M., and he wants to know if you'll go and see him first."

"Eh?"

"Yes, that's right."

Hector considered a moment. What could Perkins want? It was not in him to refuse.

"All right. I'll be over in a little while."

When Hector entered the cell, the gambler greeted him with a cry of joy.

"Here I am, Perkins," he said. "What do you want?"

Perkins looked abashed and his head dropped.

"Come along," said Hector, more kindly. "Speak out, man."

"P'raps I ain't entitled to it, Mr. Adair—but—but—I want to ask a favour—a favour of you."

"Go on," Hector encouraged him.

"The boys have been tellin' me about you, Mr. Adair. An' it appears you come from—from th' same part o' the world as I do."

"Where's that?"

"You're a Blenheim county man, ain't you?"

"Why, yes," replied Hector. "And you——?"

"Me? I'm from Arcady,"—Perkins was grinning with sheer joy—"just in th' next county. You know it?"

"The little village of Arcady?" Hector asked, in an uncompromising tone. "I know it well. I thought you were an American."

Perkins looked sheepish.

"No—ah, that's just a—a business nationality, with me. I'm a Canuck, born in Arcady, Ontario. An' I want—if it ain't asking too much, Mr. Adair, I want you to do me a little favour there."

"What is it?"

"My old mother lives there yet, Sergeant-Major."

Hector felt his sternness melting; but he said nothing.

"I wasn't—wasn't always a—a shell-game expert, Mr. Adair. I ran away from home, though, when I was nineteen—more than twenty years ago—I was wild—couldn't stand the apron-strings. Well, for a while I ran straight—an'—my mother, she forgave me, when she heard I was doin' well—an' for a long time I ust to write to her an'—an' tell her, God help me, what a fine feller I was. Then—well I left the straight an' narrow, Mr. Adair, but I couldn't bear to let my mother know, 'cause it 'ud 'a' broken her heart. So' I just kep' on pertendin' I was doin' awfully well. I wrote her a pack o' lies, Mr. Adair, but if she'd known the truth, I guess it 'ud have killed her.

"So all these years I been foolin' her, Mr. Adair. I ain't wrote to her just lately but that wasn't my fault. An' now—well, I want you to help me out, Mr. Adair."

Perkins had fired the one shaft capable of piercing Hector's otherwise impregnable armour. Before Hector left the cell he had pledged himself to go and see the gambler's mother and give her that message from her prodigal son.

And perhaps—who knew?—it might be the turning-point in Perkins' career.

"God, you're a white man, Mr. Adair," declared the gambler, as they parted, "the first white policeman I've ever met."

"None of that," growled Hector. "And mind you behave while I'm away."

"It's not much to do," he thought, as he walked back to his quarters. "A small thing——"

A small thing, yes; but then he did not know that on it was dependent an epoch in his destiny.

Chapter II

I

The journey Eastward was one bewildering revelation to Hector. The changes in the past ten years had been marvellous. It pleased him to think that without the Mounted Police they would have been impossible.

Staying nearly two days in Winnipeg—now a thriving town—he enjoyed a personal triumph. Word of his arrival brought hosts of people to see him and showers of invitations. Big Jim Hackett, one-time owner of the *Hell's Gate* saloon, now proprietor of one of the best hotels, insisted in quartering Hector and Hugh under his roof, though the place was already jammed. Andrew Ferguson, whose bakery had grown stupendously, fought with little Johnny Oakdale, now monarch of a bustling hardware store, for the pleasure of showing Hector round; and so on; and so on.

But what amused Hector was their anxiety to know just why he was going home and their unshakable conviction—in spite of all he could say—that his was a mission of love.

“Of *course* you’re going home to get married, Mr. Adair!” pretty little Miss Sinclair—Mrs. Jim Hackett now—declared, a roguish look in her eyes. “Now, listen to me—don’t deny it, because I know better. I can see it in your face. And is it any wonder? What else should a man go East for, I’d like to know? You men are all alike—lose your hearts to the first pretty girl who comes along to tell you about ‘Home.’ Who is she—one of those prying visitors, perhaps, or that moon-faced newspaper girl I saw you with when the train came in?—The hussy! But I don’t blame her, Mr. Adair. You know, I once had quite a soft spot for you myself—and *now*! Such a fine, big, bronzed fellow, handsome as a dream, so young to hold the rank, that beautiful red coat—oh, don’t blush! You know it’s true, young man!

Yes, you do! Would any of your men dare to talk to you like this? I guess not, eh? Never mind. Don't deny you're bringing a bride back with you, because you surely *will*. She's a lucky girl, whoever she is!"

"I tell you, you're talking nonsense," Hector laughed. "What should I get married for?"

"I like that! 'Nonsense!' 'What should I get married for?'" It *isn't* nonsense. It's quite time you were thinking of it."

When the sojourn was over and Hector was once more in the comparative solitude of the train, he began to ponder over this attitude. It was a strange thing that all his friends should naturally assume that he was going home to get married and, finding themselves in error, should insist that it was time he began to think of it. Obviously, they considered it inevitable that he should now contemplate entering into the holy state. As he had never given it a moment's thought till now, it was equally obvious that he must be unlike the general run of men of his age, by whom his friends, of course, judged him. Strange that he had never realized it before!

Struggling against this knowledge—the knowledge of his peculiar individuality—he next tried to tell himself that most men of his age were unattached or, at any rate, single. But his own experience rebelled against the lie. He saw that most men had at least been in love—honestly, desperately in love—before they reached his years; and he had never been in love; no, not once. Perhaps, though, this was easily explained. He had left Eastern Canada while still far too young to feel a great passion; since that time he had been so busy with his work that he had not had time to think of anything else. Besides, he had never found in the North-West a woman of such radiant beauty and soul as to meet with his ideal, which he knew was extraordinarily high. Many had pitched themselves at his head; none had satisfied him. In the East, where women were so much more numerous, now that he was to see the women of the East with a man's eyes, he might come across some-one who could light the divine spark. On the other hand, he won-

dered if he was one in whose life love had no place. There *were* people, after all, who had gone through life in that loneliness. Or perhaps he was one of those to whom Destiny allots one and only one grand passion, which was still to come.

In the end he laughed, calling himself a sentimental ass. Time enough to think of love when it came, and when love came, of marriage.

At Alma John met them and Mrs. Adair. And Hector gathered her into his arms, murmuring rapturously:

“Mother, I’m so glad to be home!”

II

The week following Hector’s homecoming was a strange, swift medley of joy and sorrow, gaiety and festival and pain, of renewing acquaintances, paying visits, exchanging reminiscences. Hector passed a sad half-hour in the churchyard where so many of those he loved best—his father, Maintop, Long Dick, Nora and the gallant Sergeant Pierce—were sleeping. He made a special journey, also, to have a look at Silvercrest; but at the last moment could not bear to see the old place in a stranger’s hands, and came away.

At the end of the week he remembered Arcady and his promise to Perkins. As it happened, no-one could spare the time to go with him. So he went alone, bearing as passport a letter of introduction to a Mr. Tweedy, friend of Allen’s and owner of half the village.

Tweedy was all that could be desired. He insisted on carrying Hector home with him for supper and later on demanded that he should stay with them for the duration of his visit, whatever that might be.

After supper Hector broached his errand, intending to lead up to the main point in a roundabout way and to conceal such facts as he deemed advisable. But Mrs. Tweedy—a bright little woman with glasses and a tireless but mercifully charitable tongue—in her first reply, made further questioning almost unnecessary and settled poor Perkins’ perplexities for ever.

"Mrs. John Perkins?—Mrs. John Perkins?—Let me see, now. A widow, eh? There *was* a Mrs. Perkins here—very old—son ran away—only child—the rascal!—you say that's the one? Oh, yes, I know whom you mean. Oh, *she's* dead!"

The news gave Hector an unpleasant shock and his heart went out to Perkins. A little later, he decided to confide everything to the sympathetic couple. Tweedy shook his head a great many times, Mrs. Tweedy wiped her glasses and murmured "Poor thing! Poor boy! Oh, dear! Well, well!" and both offered to do everything possible to assist Hector if he wished to give the affair any more attention.

"Then," said Hector, "You'll take me over to the Post Office and the old lady's grave. I want to make some enquiries about Perkins' letters and I'd like to be able to tell him——"

In the morning, Hector learned that Perkins' letters had been duly delivered to the old lady up to the time of her death and that those received since had been sent to the dead letter office. Perkins had received nothing from the dead letter office. But then, he moved round so much that this was not surprising. Tweedy then took his guest over to the tumbledown shack which Mrs. Perkins had occupied. The afternoon found him too busy to drive to the cemetery. Hector obtained full directions as to the route and made the journey on foot, took a mental photograph of the grave for Perkins, and turned homeward.

He forgot all about Perkins a few minutes later, in the beauty of the autumn evening. The sun, a paling disc, was dropping slowly down towards its sanctuary behind the far blue hills. Arcady, loveliest of all havens in Ontario, lay below him, in a wide valley brimful of golden sunlight, glorious with the mingling greys and browns and scarlets of woods and fields and orchards. The road on which he stood ran winding into the distant town, resting like a sleeping child in the middle of it all. Harvesters still lingered in the grain. The orchards glowed with crimson apples. From the chimneys of Arcady and the summer cottages which fringed the sparkling, rippling lake beyond,

thin threads of blue-grey smoke rose straight upwards through the bracing, sweetly scented air and on the lake a single sail gleamed like a flake of snow. Somewhere, near at hand, a bird called, mournfully, persistently, while a church bell tolled with mellow voice a long way off. The picture was all that Home and Peace and Canada could mean to Hector and for a little while it held him, fresh as he was from raw, unsettled wildernesses and scenes of fierce toil and sordid crime, in a rapturous enchantment.

He felt, then, as if he was poised upon the edge of Paradise, as if marvels that he could not even guess were about to be made known to him.

In this strange mood, he walked steadily down into the valley and along a lane which would take him to Tweedy's by a short cut. Tall hedges bright with changing leaves enclosed this lane and it was fringed by autumn flowers and overhung by loaded boughs. A wind brought to him the rich smell of hay and apples and stirred the rustling leaves which strewn the ruts before him. A small bird piped drowsily.

Then, suddenly, as he pushed aside a screen of branches, he knew that this visit to Arcady was not to be fruitless after all, that there was a purpose behind it; and learnt, suddenly, why Destiny had sent him there.

For, suddenly, he saw her.

III

His coming took her by complete surprise and, for a time which might be measured in seconds, she remained unconscious of his presence. She was sitting on a stile which led into an orchard on the left side of the lane, her face and figure steeped in the golden sunlight and boldly framed by sprays of scarlet leaves against a background of clear sky. Her head was partly turned away but Hector could see that she was unusually pretty. The soft freshness of girlhood blended in her face with the character of womanhood and her hair—he had never seen anything like her hair, a kind of ruddy gold, almost copper, shot with sun-

beams which played in it as if they were alive. She wore a dress that was soft and white and billowy and from her arm hung a small straw hat on two blue ribbons.

So much he saw in the first swift moment. And then he perceived that she was crying, not noisily or violently, but quietly, with slowly welling tears. He wondered why. Presently he noticed that she was holding out her skirt in front and staring at it with a world of misery in her eyes. There was a jagged rent in the skirt. A tiny bit of stuff fluttering on a nail in the stile told him everything. And now she found relief from her vexation in the customary feminine manner.

Hector, sensing nothing more than its rarer beauty, was for a moment lost in admiring contemplation of the perfect picture. The moment passing, he wavered between pity and amusement. From this mood he slowly fluttered back to earth, to a realization that he was staring with unforgivable rudeness, that he was intruding on a lady's privacy and that courtesy demanded he should make his presence known without further delay. But still he could not bear to speak and break the spell. And, while he hesitated, she glanced up with a startled expression and met his eyes with hers.

Had he been a Chinese mandarin in full regalia she could not have looked more astonished or alarmed.

"What—what—who are you?" she asked him.

And Hector, stepping back in some confusion, like a boy caught stealing jam, stammered:

"Excuse me—er—I beg your pardon!"

By this time she had jumped hastily to her feet, dropping the jagged tear into concealment and swiftly dabbing her eyes with the tiniest of handkerchiefs. Annoyance crept into her face. Then came an awkward pause and her annoyance seemed to conflict with a sudden fit of shyness. They faced each other in silence.

"How—how long had you been there?" she enquired at last.

Hector, self-possession rapidly returning, came out from among the screening leaves into which he had temporarily recoiled.

"Not long," he said. "Only a second or two, in fact. I had no idea you were there, of course; and then—when I saw you—I was rather caught unawares and I hated to disturb you because——"

He paused, the ghost of a laugh in his eyes. "Well, because what?" was what he wanted her to say. But she continued to look at him in silence and he finished the sentence himself:

"Because you looked so beautiful."

She flushed a little. He wondered if she would reprove him. Instead, she bit her lip and a hint of laughter played about the corner of her mouth, reflecting back his whim.

"I know I ought to have coughed or something. I most certainly should have coughed. I really am very sorry."

The apology was genuine. She accepted it and said so, not in so many words, but in continuing the parley.

"I tore my dress," she explained ruefully, as if in self-defence. "I wanted to go home by a short cut. So I thought I'd try this lane. The stile here makes it a shorter cut than ever. I—I wanted to get over it . . . and couldn't. And my dress caught on that nail; and it was a new one, too!"

She struggled with a fresh outbreak of grief and an obvious confusion which seemed to say: 'I know that ladies don't scramble over stiles. But the truth is the truth and must be told. What do you think of me?'

Hector looked at her gravely.

"That really is too bad," he sympathized. "It's a fine dress; and a very awkward stile."

She was grateful.

"Yes, isn't it—or aren't they—is that what I mean? I shall have to walk back by the long way now."

With that, she prepared to go. The dialogue was obviously over and Hector had received his dismissal.

But he could not let the matter end so soon and in this manner!

"Excuse me," he said, gently extending a detaining hand, "excuse me for intruding further and for contradicting, but—you don't *really* have to, you know!"

She looked at him quickly—apparently decided to ignore

this assertion—moved on a step or two—thought better of it—and, halting, asked him calmly:

“How is that?”

Again the bantering look crept in Hector’s eyes.

“Well, if I may suggest it, I can help you across.”

He nodded towards the stile.

She looked puzzled, followed his glance, and smiled amusedly.

“I don’t quite understand,” she told him.

Hector smiled back.

“I don’t believe you’re very heavy. I’m sure—” greatly daring, he ventured the plunge, “I could easily lift you over.”

She raised her eyebrows gravely. Hector felt that he had damned himself.

“Lift me over?” she queried.

He bowed his head.

“But—I—I don’t even know you,” she laughed delightfully. “You’re a complete stranger.”

Hector echoed her laugh. Then, becoming serious again, “I can soon put that right. Name, Adair, Hector. Rank, Sergeant-Major. Regiment, the North-West——”

“Oh, I know *that*,” she exclaimed. “North-West Mounted Police, aren’t you?” There was a good deal of pride in her voice, as of one who parades his knowledge. “Why, of course—you’re staying with the Tweedys—down——”

She stopped, ashamed of her enthusiasm.

“You’ll think I know too much,” she said. “But news travels very quickly in a quiet little village like this. And *anything* is news. Oh, I didn’t mean——”

Hector smiled.

“I know,” he said. “I understand. So I needn’t really go on with my explanations now. You have my name and credentials. In turn——”

“Yes?”

“To complete the introduction, you must of course tell me yours.”

“Mine? Oh, I couldn’t do that!”

"Come along," Hector urged. He was thoroughly enjoying this episode. "That's only fair. Why not?"

"But——" she seemed doubtful. "This—this is all so *very* informal."

"Still," said Hector, "even so—you can at least tell me your name and where you live. You might as well, you know, because I'll find out anyway. You forget that we of the Police can find out anything—yes, anything. And we generally have our way."

Looking at him, she knew that he spoke the truth. But she fenced skilfully.

"Then I'll leave you to find out," she smiled.

"Please tell me."

She shook her head. His earnest gaze discomfited her.

"Come along. Considering that I'm going to render you a service, it's the least you can do."

"Service?" she enquired. Then, remembering, "Oh, but I really don't think it should be done."

"Nonsense," he laughed. "I'll do it so quickly—so nicely—that you won't even know it till it's all over."

She shook her head again and began to move off.

"Don't go. Think of the short cut!" he urged.

"It's not right," she said.

He wondered if she really meant it or was only laughing at him.

"Come on!" he said firmly, eyes discreetly challenging.

Suddenly she tossed her head, with a little laugh.

"Come on, then!"

Fatal things, stiles! Instantly he had swung her lightly off her feet. His face was so close to hers that he could count the lashes of her eyes and smell the soft perfume of her wonderful hair. For some reason unknown, he felt intoxicatingly dizzy. Deadly things, stiles!

He had her at an advantage. But she had trusted him and he was a gentleman. Climbing easily over the stile, he set her down.

Breathless and laughing, she drew back a stray strand of hair with her small white fingers. He waited.

"Thank you," she said quietly and extended her hand. Surely this was not the end?

Hector took the hand.

"Won't you tell me who you are *now?*" he asked.

She laughed, her eyes dancing.

"Please!" he said. "Remember, I can and will find out in any case, if I wish!"

His square jaw backed his words.

Suddenly she seemed to relent.

"You remind me of Gareth, the Knight of the Round Table," she declared solemnly. By this time she had gently withdrawn her hand. "Do you remember? He rescued a damsel in distress—" her eyes lighted up mischievously, "and——"

"Yes?" he encouraged.

"She was *very* unkind to him. Her name was Lynette."

"Well?"

"You may call me Lynette."

Then she turned swiftly and left him. He hoped she would look back. But she did not.

IV

Moving rapidly through the orchard, the girl passed on to a square white house, and slipped upstairs to her room. Her heart was beating furiously, her eyes were bright and her head bewilderingly full of Indians, teepees, pistols, horses and Mounted Policemen, Mounted Policemen everywhere. . . . Impulsively she dropped to her knees at the window, head on arms, and let the evening breeze ruffle her gleaming hair. Her eyes were full of dreams. . . .

That night, when she had gone to bed, the visions of the afternoon came back to her and, getting up again, she resumed her place at the window. The darkness was more soothing than the sunset and the light breeze cooler than at dusk. For what seemed hours she knelt there, trying to put aside the pictures in her mind, yet glad they would not leave her. Beneath them all, something she had once read

ran persistently through her head, a bit of poetry, going something like this:

*When may Love come to me?
In the cold grey hush of the dawn,
In the fierce brilliance of noonday,
In the soft warm blue of twilight
Or the depth of night.
Perhaps in the freshness of Spring,
Perhaps in the fulness of Summer,
Or the blazing glories of Autumn
Or the white silence of Winter,
Then Love may come to you!*

*How may Love come to me?
Like a monk, colourless, solemn,
Or perhaps a little boy, weeping,
Or a sinner, pleading repentance,
Or a poet, listlessly dreaming,
Or a soldier, radiant, glowing,
Passionate, terrible, merciless,
Girdled with lightning and thunder,
Hailed with a pealing of trumpets,
Thus may Love come to you!*

So the words ran. From them, boldly, perplexingly, continuously, these few phrases stood out before her:

"In the soft warm blue of twilight . . . or the blazing glories of Autumn . . . a soldier, radiant, glowing. . . . Then Love may come to you. . . . Thus may Love come to you!"

"In the soft warm blue of twilight . . . or the blazing glories of Autumn . . . a soldier, radiant, glowing. . . ."

The words would not leave her. And, every time she saw them, they conjured up before her eyes—again, she could not tell why—a picture of the man she had met that afternoon.

Hector finished his walk that night in a pleasant reverie, thankful that the gods had rewarded his charitable visit so swiftly and so kindly. After dinner, careful to conceal the depth of his interest, he described the girl to Mrs. Tweedy.

"Sort of red-headed girl, eh?" said the good lady. "Well, not exactly red-headed—more goldish, copperish, bronzish! With beautiful features—almost classical, I think—but not so inhuman—taller than most girls—and *such* a voice! Of course I know her! That's Frances Edginton—Major Edginton's daughter—an only child. She has the sweetest little mother—oh, such a sweet woman! He's a bit of a tyrant, though—regular martinet—stuck up, I think—well off, retired Army, and very strict in his ideas. No, they don't live here. Where *do* the Edgintons live, Arthur? Don't know? Neither do I. I don't believe anyone does. They're only here for the summer. In fact, this is the first summer they've been in Arcady. Yes, that's his daughter—Frances Edginton. Lovely, *I* think—yes, that's the word! Lovely!"

"I'll have to meet her again," thought Hector, "just to show I've found out. Lynette—eh?—Frances—not much alike—both awfully pretty——"

Turning in that night, he was astonished to find that he could not put Frances out of his mind. Her face remained before him, sometimes with that bantering little smile upon it, sometimes sweetly serious and framed, always, with that radiant halo of red-gold hair. Now he was watching her sitting on the stile in tearful contemplation of her torn new dress. Now he was holding her hand again, feeling the gentle pressure of her fingers when she thanked him. Now he was listening to her laugh, her merry, bubbling little laugh, now to her voice, that was one moment level, smooth, passionless, the next intense and earnest and always soft and melodious as running water, caressing as a summer breeze. Really, her voice—it was something quite extraordinary. He quite agreed with Mrs. Tweedy there!

Voice, laugh, face, eyes, hair—one after another, round and round, they all came back throughout the night. It was a pleasure simply to think about them. Was he growing

sentimental, he wondered? What was the matter with him, anyhow?

In the morning, he knew—or thought he knew.

“I must be in love—at last.”

He saw, now, that the prophecies of his friends in Winnipeg had been heralds of this moment, sent by Destiny.

He *was* in love—at last!

v

Few men reach mature years without experiencing a sincere ‘affair.’ Those that do are generally leaders of monastic lives remote from cities or settlements where women congregate—are soldiers, sailors, missionaries, pioneers. But when love comes at last to men of that stamp, especially when their segregation has preserved their boyhood ideals regarding women, especially when stern discipline of soul and body and close contact with Nature—another name for God—has prepared them for its coming—then they love as men love at their noblest, deepest and best, bringing with them the fiery ardour of strength developed and the reverent rapture of youth.

Hector was ‘of that stamp.’

Having discovered that he loved Frances, he shaped his campaign, as usual, with a sure, determined hand. The first thing, of course, was to see her again, as soon and as often as possible. He had originally intended to leave Arcady by the earliest train. Therefore as a preliminary, he sent, in the morning, the following wire to John:

‘Unavoidably and indefinitely detained. Important business.’

“Well, it *is* important business!” he excused himself.

Next, he went to Mrs. Tweedy.

“Mrs. Tweedy, I like Arcady so well that I’ve decided to accept your invitation and stay on a while.”

“There, now!” said Mrs. Tweedy. “Why, I’m just delighted! And we’ll have *such* times!”

Mrs. Tweedy, true to her word, immediately launched him out like a debutante among the villagers and summer

visitors, who asked him to all their picnics, dances, and parties. At the first of these affairs, he met Frances. Catching the amused recognition in her eyes, he forestalled Mrs. Tweedy's formal introduction:

"Oh, yes—Miss Edginton. I've already had the honour——"

Mrs. Tweedy melted away.

"You see, Lynette," he added, "I told you the Police always find out!"

"O, marvellous young knight!" she answered.

Thenceforward he constantly sought her company.

In due course he met the Major, who was all and more than all that Mrs. Tweedy had said. He reminded Hector, to a certain extent, of his own father. A middle-sized, very soldierly man, with keen eyes, snow-white hair and drooping white moustache, he conformed to a distinct type of which Colonel Adair has been a taller and finer edition. Toward Hector he adopted an attitude of distant politeness, which seemed to say at every turn, 'Thus far and no farther.' 'He knows I'm a gentleman,' Hector decided, 'and consequently feels that he must be at least courteous, though it hurts him terribly—because I'm an N. C. O.' But, knowing the Army officer of the Old School, he neither heeded nor resented Major Edginton.

Mrs. Edginton he fell in love with at once. She was small, dainty and faded, very sweet and gracious. From Mrs. Edginton Frances had stolen her pansy eyes, clean-cut features and extraordinary hair. Hector decided that Mrs. Edginton had long played second fiddle to the Major. But he also saw that Frances was all the world to her. 'If anything ever happens,' Hector thought, 'she'll find herself torn between her duty to her husband and her love for her daughter; though, everything considered, I think a man might count her an ally.'

On the whole, she reminded him of his mother, just as the Major recalled his father.

These observations were made at odd moments, when he was not busy in pursuit of Frances. In this pursuit, he threw his whole heart and soul towards the objective, forgot

everything and everybody else and was thoroughly and completely happy.

Every hour with Frances brought forward some delightful discovery serving to bind him still more closely. Her beauty did not fade on closer acquaintance, as that of other women did, but became, if possible, more obvious than before and revealed some fresh and striking charm that dazzled him. The sun, striking through her hair from this angle or that, gave it a tone which hitherto he had not seen. Her eyes, in such a light, took on a purple mystery as yet unknown to them. And so on and so on, as the youth in him directed.

He found out other things, concerned, not with her appearance but with her personality and character. The sweetness which had first attracted him proved even deeper than he had imagined. She developed an unexpected serenity of strength. Her sense of humour, of which he had learned something at the stile, he discovered was a charming, eager, whimsical thing, quaint and illusive as a fairy, brilliant as a sunbeam, subtle as far-off laughter. He loved a woman with a sense of humour, such as that possessed by Frances. He loved a woman with insight and understanding. She had both. She possessed, in fact, everything necessary to create between them a powerful bond of sympathy. Her ideals were just as he would have them. Quite obviously, she was meant for him.

In the meantime, what practical knowledge of her had he acquired? From her own lips he acquired it, in short order. Her father was English, her mother a Canadian. They had met while the Major was in garrison at Halifax and had been married there. She looked on herself as a Canadian and Canada was her home but she really had no home at all, unless it was her father's in England, which she barely knew. The Major had retired long ago and the family had been wanderers ever since she could remember. She had lived and attended school in the States, in France and England until old enough to 'come out' and had made her debut in London. Today she knew 'Society'—as distinguished from 'society'—amazingly well, after only two seasons. Her stay in Arcady was in the nature of a rest cure. Her normal life

lay in fashionable circles, among titles and flunkies and millionaires. In a short time they would be going back to that life but had not yet settled on their movements.

To Hector, this was discouraging. It meant that their paths, though Fate had brought them together for a time in Arcady, lay really far apart. Hers led through worlds of wealth and ease, inhabited by the fortunate few, his through poverty and toil, inhabited by suffering millions. Well, never mind. Here, in Arcady, they were on common ground, The future?—He dared not face the future, so he let it go.

So, day by day, beneath her influence, his love developed and grew, not like a sun leaping suddenly over the horizon or a flower opening slowly into radiance but like a strain of music that marches from a soft, plaintive opening through a spreading, quickening crescendo to a glorious, crashing climax which has in it immeasurable power and majesty, peace and tenderness and a hint of terrible storm. And eyes that understood saw her wakening and responding, like a placid lake stirred gradually, almost imperceptibly, to movement by gathering winds. Hector could not see it. He was a child in such matters.

Mrs. Tweedy saw it, though, was thrilled to ecstasy and did her level best to make a match between the two.

Day by day—and all that remained now, for Hector, was to make the plunge. Had he been anything but a child in such matters, he might have read his answer a thousand times in her eyes. As it was, he kept putting off the fateful day. But time was moving on. Within five days he must leave for the West. Of his total leave period of forty-two days, thirty were already gone. Seven days were required for the return trip West. Of the five days remaining, he owed his mother the majority. His scheme was to speak to Frances first, then to her father as soon afterwards as possible and then, whatever the outcome, to go home. If he was successful at this, the greatest moment of his life, he would make further plans later on. All arrangements, whether successful or not, he had to fit into this essential—his return to duty on time.

Seeing her at the Post Office one morning, he seized his opportunity.

"Meet me at the stile tonight—at any time that suits you," he whispered.

"You sound like a popular song," she whispered back.

She had never had a rendezvous with him before.

"Don't laugh," he pleaded. "Will you? Don't joke with me—*now*. Will you?"

She nodded, secretly overwhelmed.

"At nine o'clock," she told him.

VI

At half-past eight Hector left the house to walk to the stile.

The night was perfect—an ideal night in autumn—with all the mystery and magic that go with it. A harvest moon, like a great balloon of orange silk illuminated from within, rode low in the darkness, apparently tethered among ghostly trees in the heart of a valley beyond a sheaf-crowned ridge. A filmy veil, all shadowy blues and mauves and greys, invested day's familiar objects with a strange and supernatural beauty. The night air was soft and cool and murmurous with the music of innumerable insects. The wind sighed gently in the trees, with an eerie whisper, and brought with it a hundred subtle perfumes.

At nine o'clock he reached the stile.

She was there.

"Is that you, Hector?"

Her voice was startlingly distinct.

"Yes, Frances."

They began to talk—at first in broken, uneasy sentences—later settling down into their customary ease. After a time, he slowly swung to the personal. She knew that he was paving the way to the vital matter and she helped him cleverly.

Now, haltingly but indomitably, he began. He was very close to her but staring into the darkness before him. She

could see his face in firm silhouette against the moonlight sky.

"All my life"—he was saying—"I'd been in a military atmosphere, with soldiers and sailors all round me. The thing was in my blood. You can't understand—well, perhaps, you can, because your father was a soldier, too. But you're a woman. Only men, I think, can feel the—I suppose I mean the fascination of it, though that isn't just the word I want. And even men can't understand it, unless they're born in it, too. It's a wonderful thing, reserved for Service families. Besides, I'd been encouraged. I was to have a Commission and be a soldier. That's what I was told. So, when I was a baby, even, I was dreaming of some day being an officer and—well, I admit it—a great man."

"Go on," she said; his quiet voice holding her.

"Well, my father's death seemed to smash all that. I was a youngster and it broke my heart. However, I plucked up courage at last—and began to look out for a chance. I was determined I was going to be a soldier, anyway, and if necessary I'd work my way up to a Commission. I hung on to my dreams."

"Poor little Hector!" she murmured.

His words conjured up a pathetic picture. She touched his hand sympathetically. He went on.

"One day my chance came. They were organizing the Mounted Police. Not exactly soldiers—but soldier-police-men. I joined—and set out to work my way up."

She was silent, enthralled. She knew that a strong man was paying her the greatest tribute in his power—was showing her the most secret places of his heart.

"It was hard work—hard, hard, hard. But I loved it—do still. I had luck, of course. Early this year, they made me Sergeant-Major of my division—after ten years. The next step is either Regimental Sergeant-Major or a Commission. I hope it's a Commission—I'm almost certain it will be. Probably next year. You know what it will mean to me."

She thought she knew—the goal of a lifetime and of innumerable trials and struggles achieved at last, by sheer will-power and stark, unaided effort.

"But that's not all. You know, I couldn't talk to everyone like this, Frances. It sounds—well, I don't know how it sounds. You can see what I mean. Never mind! I'm going to finish. Where was I? Oh, yes—that's not all. Remember, I said just now, I wanted to be not only an officer, but—but a great man! When I get my Commission, my first dream is reached. The other one remains.

"During those years, Frances"—his voice took on a more intense note—"I never—I never thought of—well, love. That is, in a personal way. Somehow, it never entered my head. I was busy—busy all the time. Women are few and far between out there. I suppose I'd have—well, fallen in love, like most people, if I'd met anyone that attracted me—or fitted in with my ideals. But I never did. I suppose I'm hard to please—thank God. I wanted," he was stumbling now, like a man on a rough road, in the dark. "Oh, you know—a woman—well," he laughed, "of course, that was beautiful—but a *good* woman—strong—and fine as true steel. Well, they're rare—or I'm blind. I began to think—when I thought of it at all—that they didn't exist. But they do!"

Her heart pounded. He had taken her hand in his, in a strong grasp.

"I've found one in particular."

For a moment he was silent.

"Now, with *that* girl—well, there's nothing I couldn't do—nothing! With her to work for, nothing in the world could hold me back! I want her, because—well, my dream of greatness might never come without her—it wouldn't be worth while even if it did—and the road would be—well, the longest, hardest road that ever man trod. I want that girl's love to help me. Together—but, God knows, I don't want to brag.

"I've found her—Frances—but I hardly dare to tell her. I'm only—well, I'm only an N. C. O., with a precarious future. My Commission is almost a certainty but even that won't add much to my pay, which will be a pittance to the end of time. Even after that, if I do ever amount to anything, it will still be a pittance. Today, in the eyes of the

big world and of those this girl associates with, I'm nobody; and if I got to the very top, I'd still be nobody, to some of them. She has millionaires and famous men in bucketsful to choose from—and she's so wonderful that they're fighting to be chosen. So how could I hope she'd look at me? Out where I come from, of course, it's different, Frances. A man's a man not because of what he *has* but what he *is*. And that's *right*. It's not money that counts, in this world, really. It's the big things—the things—well, the things worth fighting for. I think I'm fighting for a big thing. And I—do you know, Frances, I think this girl will see things with my eyes? So I'm going to tell her that I love her and—leave the rest with her. Do you think I'm right?"

His heart—all his hopes, dreams, ideals, his simple, noble creed and code—were lying before her now, for her inspection. In that moment, she saw him a giant, remembered what he had said, 'With that girl to work for—nothing in the world could hold me back!' and felt herself dominated with his strength and courage.

"Frances," he repeated, quietly—close to her, now, and both her hands in his—"do you think I'm right?"

Her heart was hammering.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Do you know who the girl is?"—Closer still and breathless. "It's you—Frances—you!"

For answer, she lifted up her face to his. Then she was in his arms and nothing else mattered. . . .

She was the first to break that rapturous spell, with words that stabbed him like knives or caressed him like soft hands.

"You've been—so honest with me, Hector," she said, a little tremulously, "that I'm going to be the same with you."

He bowed his head.

"You said you were afraid of famous men and millionaires—why, Hector, they sicken me. Hector, you're the first real *man* I've ever met. Oh, it isn't just that nice red coat—though that goes to my head like champagne, Hector. You are—you really *are*. Every girl has dreams, too. 'Some day,' I dreamt, 'I'll meet a real—*real*—man—brave, strong,

chivalrous, with great, yes, great ideals—a fairy Prince, a Knight of the Round Table!’ They say they don’t live now—Oh, but they do! Perhaps the armour’s gone, but they are Knights and Princes just the same. ‘Well,’ I said to myself, ‘some day, God willing, I’ll meet a man like that. How will I know him? Oh, I’ll know him, never fear! And he’ll come’—well, just as you came, Hector. And—it was you. I knew at once. Hector, I’d go with you to the world’s end, if you asked me. But—Oh, Hector, there’s——”

“I know,” said Hector calmly. “Your father! He doesn’t care for N. C. O.s——”

She looked away hastily.

“Oh, don’t be ashamed,” he added. “It’s quite natural.”

“You must see him,” said Frances at last. “But you don’t know him. He has a terrible temper and he’s like granite—just like granite. Well, you must ask him—dear. We have to risk it. I don’t think he’d—hurt me, Hector. Besides, your’re a soldier’s son—and—it isn’t as if you had no prospects. But oh, I’m afraid—I’m afraid——” Her head sank on her breast. He took her two hands again and turned her towards him suddenly.

“Look at me!” he ordered, terribly earnest.

She obeyed.

“Frances—if—if your father says ‘No’—will you wait? Will you stick to me? Only say that, and *I’ll* wait for ever—to the very end, Frances. You say you know me. Well, believe me now.”

Tears brimmed in her eyes.

“Will you, Frances?”

“Oh, Hector, I’ll promise! But my father—my father——”

“I know. But I’ll speak to him. I’ll bring him round. For you, Frances”—his voice rang—“I’d fight the whole wide world! You must trust me.”

“I’ll tell Mother,” she whispered, in return. “She’ll be on our side. She’ll help—prepare him, Hector. And, because you’ve got to go so soon,” she faltered, but went on bravely, “I’ll arrange things for tomorrow night. And I’ll—I’ll be

praying for your success, Hector. You—you don't think me miserably weak?"

"No," said Hector swiftly, "of course not. Then that's settled. But, Oh——" for the first time his voice quavered with a note of agony, quickly suppressed, "if I fail—if I fail—wait for me. Wait for me! Will you?"

"Yes," she said again.

"Frances——!"

The moon went out behind a bank of cloud and the wind freshened, wailing.

At last they parted . . . till 'Tomorrow.'

VII

"And so——?" said Major Edginton.

The two men faced each other in the Major's big living-room.

"And so," said Hector, "I want, sir, to marry your daughter."

The Major remained silent for a moment. Hector's heart beat furiously. Outwardly, he was perfectly calm.

"You—want—to—marry—my—daughter?"

Astonishment and stinging scorn!

Hector held himself strongly.

"Yes, sir."

Then suddenly the Major dashed his mask aside.

"And who the devil are you?" he almost shrieked.

The cry was to Hector a violent slap in the face. Deadly insult and utter defeat dominated it. But he stood firm. He had anticipated a hard fight.

"I don't know what you mean," he replied calmly, "I have already told you who I am."

The Major stared at him. For a moment Hector's personality beat him into sanity.

"But, good God, man—*my* daughter!" he exclaimed, under his breath. His hard eyes glared sombrely beneath their white brows. "*My* daughter!"

"Yes, sir."

Whatever happened, Hector must keep his temper. To lose it would be fatal.

"But—but——" the Major was incredible now and inclined toward laughter, "why—do you realize who I am?"

"Yes," said Hector, quite unawed.

"I'm a Major in the Regular Army! And you—and you—why——"

"Well?"

Hector's voice was very gentle but it said 'Be careful!'

The Major was deaf to the warning.

"You're nothing but——" he choked, "You're nothing but a N. C. O!"

The assertion goaded. Still Hector kept his temper. After all, this was Frances' father, who could make or mar their lives.

"That's true—nothing but a Sergeant-Major. From your point of view, sir, that's my misfortune. But many N. C. O.s are gentlemen. Anyway, I'm not asking your daughter to marry a Sergeant-Major who will be a Sergeant-Major for ever. I've already told you, sir, of my prospects."

"Prospects——" muttered the Major, "prospects are—prospects, sir, nothing more. To me you're a ranker and always will be. Have you got your recommendation for a Commission yet?" he concluded swiftly.

"No, sir."

"Well, then—but, good God, what's the use of my wasting time? I don't care whether you've a thousand recommendations! I look for something better for my daughter than a man in the ranks—or an officer who's served in the ranks. Confound it, they're all one to me—understand? My God, it's like your—your colossal impertinence——!"

He flashed into fury.

Hector had paled under his tan. He put out a hand.

"Steady, sir, please. Let's take this thing quietly."

"Hang you—now you're attempting to dictate—damnation, sir!"

"No, sir, I'm not. I want a chance, that's all. Your daughter—loves me, sir. You wouldn't break her heart?"

This was only adding fuel to the fire.

"Loves you? Break her heart? My God, but you—you have the most colossal impertinence I ever beheld!"

"It's true, sir. She's told you so herself."

"Pah!" the old man snarled. "She's a child—a child! A mere infatuation! A mere infatuation! Puppy-love, sir, puppy-love. You sweep her off her feet, swaggering about in your wretched red coat——"

"Wretched red coat, sir? The Queen's uniform, don't forget—the uniform *you* wore!"

The blow went home. The major mumbled.

"Well, in any case," he resumed at length, "it's a mere infatuation! As soon as you're gone, she'll forget all about you!"

Malicious vindictiveness inspired him.

"Do you think so, sir?"

Hector's voice was very unemotional.

"Yes, sir, I do! Why, good God, Sergeant-Major"—Hector knew that the 'Sergeant-Major' was slightly meant and for a moment a strange light glowed in his eyes—"my daughter associates with men of position—men—men—hang it all, *gentlemen!*"

Again another slap in the face, vicious, stinging!

"Do I take it, sir," again Hector let the insult pass, fighting his battle for Frances with all the strength he had, "that the fact that I'm in the ranks is the big objection?"

The Major remained gloweringly silent.

"Is it?"

"M-m-perhaps," the old man snapped.

"And—and——" try as he would, Hector could not prevent his voice trembling as he put the fateful question, "will it stand against me always—Commission or no Commission?"

"Certainly," the Major replied firmly.

"That's final?"

"Good God, yes! How many times must I tell you?"

"But—you're a civilian now. I associate with gentlemen-civilians. We all do."

"Gentlemen-rankers do *not* associate with the circles in which my daughter is accustomed to move, sir! But I will not prolong this discussion. I don't know you—I don't want

to know you——” the old man, rising to a pinnacle of temper, leaped suddenly to his feet. “Who are you? Nobody! Where do you come from? God knows! Who the devil was your father? God only knows! Your mother? God knows! Oh, leave my house, sir, leave my house!”

Insult on insult, stonily endured, for Frances’ sake; but this last tirade was more than Hector could stand. He forgot everything now—Frances—the future—everything but the fact that this ranting old bigot had cast unforgivable reflections on his dead father, his mother and his own personal honour. Standing rigid under the rain of abuse, he remained so now, but his fists were clenched and his eyes blazing in a deathly face.

“Major Edginton,” he said hoarsely, “thank God, you’re an old, helpless man or nothing in the world would save you now! You can take her away, you can do what you like, but you can’t kill her love or mine! We’ll beat you, in the end. I’m sorry you took things this way. The fault for tonight’s breach lies with you. Remember that—always!”

“Leave my house!”

Hector turned on his heel and marched blindly out of the room.

Frances, on the landing upstairs, fearing the worst, was praying incoherently, desperately. And then—the door of the living-room swung open, was softly closed and she heard Hector’s firm tread—one—two—three—four—go through the hall, out of the house into silence, awful, heart-breaking silence.

Those measured sounds beat on her brain. She never forgot them. They marked this fact: Hector had failed.

Drunk with agony, she heard her mother’s quavering, pitiful voice, ‘My dear, my dear!’ . . .

Three days later the tearful Mrs. Tweedy smuggled a note into her hands.

“What was he like?” she asked.

“Oh, don’t ask me—don’t ask me,” said Mrs. Tweedy.

This was the note—dated from John’s:

"Frances, my Darling—

"I'm sorry I couldn't see you before I left. It was useless to attempt it, as your father would not allow it. Frances, your father and I had a terrible quarrel. He wouldn't hear of our marriage and he insulted me as no man ever dared to do before. I stood it as long as I could but, though I regret it now beyond any words, I couldn't put up with what he said in the end. Perhaps when I've got my Commission, he may relent. You must do your best to influence him. But in any case, I ask you to keep your promise to me. Keep it, and your courage. No matter how things go against us or how long we have to wait, I'll never change. Before God, I swear this, Frances. I know you have the strength to be true also. And if you ever can write or come to me, 'North-West Mounted Police, N.W.T.' will always find me. I'm going back today.

Till we meet again, then—

Hector."

The letter was written on a piece of John's notepaper with the Adair crest upon it. She looked at the crest and at the proud, stern motto, 'Strong.—Steadfast.' The words seemed to her the very embodiment of Hector, of his promise, of everything she must be and had sworn to be in the long and hopeless night before her.

Chapter III

I

Hector and Superintendent Denton walked over together to headquarters, a group of sunlit buildings in the shadow of the straining Union Jack. A brilliant young sentry paced the path between trim rows of whitewashed stones, an orderly kept guard in the ante-room and the atmosphere breathed the ceremonious and formal efficiency invariably surrounding such places. Somewhere within this group of buildings was the Holy of Holies, the sacred and inviolate sanctum which held the High Priest of this Canadian Order of Knights Templar, the terrible and all-powerful Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police.

They entered the Presence.

"Sit down, Denton." The Commissioner cordially waved the Superintendent to a seat. "Good afternoon, Sergeant-Major."

Hector saluted. The Commissioner looked at him quizzingly.

"I called you 'Sergeant-Major,' Mr. Adair. As a matter of fact, my recommendation which, as you know, was forwarded to Ottawa after Major Denton had brought your services to my notice in a very laudatory manner, has been approved and your appointment as Inspector is gazetted. I wanted to be the first to congratulate you on an unusually well-earned promotion."

He held out his hand. Thus was Hector's lifetime ambition achieved.

Presently the Commissioner told Hector to draw up a chair.

"I haven't had you brought here merely for this, Adair. I'm going to entrust you with an important—a very im-

portant—mission and I think it as well for me to give you some details myself.”

In a hushed voice, he proceeded to explain.

“You’ve known that for several months we’ve been fearing trouble with the Indians and half-breeds; but I doubt if you know just how serious the position really is. Ever since the Government surveyors appeared, Adair, there’s a storm been brewing. The half-breeds want their land parceled out in their own way, *not* the Government way; and they mean to have it. That’s the main grievance. They have others. In addition, they see the railway making rapid progress and they know what that means. Once the railway goes through, settlers will follow in tens of thousands and the old order—the order we found when we first came here—will have received its death blow. They don’t like this and they mean to prevent it. I think they’d be all right if it wasn’t for the agitators. They’re in every settlement and camp and they’re doing their best to bring about a revolt. Our business is to keep the peace; and I mean to see that it is kept.

“I’m having all camps, settlements and agitators carefully watched. Every movement, every event is known to me. One of the reserves which needs especially close watching is Bear Tooth’s, near Broncho. Bear Tooth’s all right, I think, and so are most of his chiefs; but his young men are warlike, there’s a lot of them and Broncho is temptingly close by. If they kicked over the traces, the results might be terrible. So I must have them watched night and day—but diplomatically. Bear Tooth mustn’t be offended. Nothing must be done to stir up suspicion or hatred. This needs a good man. I’m sending you, Adair. Your qualifications are exceptional. You’ve proved yourself over and over again. And you’ve made it your business to know the Indians thoroughly. It’s a devilish big thing for a new officer, Adair. But you’re an old Policeman—and big enough.”

Then, while Hector expanded with pleasure inside, he added:

“Inspector Lescheneaux will be working with you but you’ll be independent of each other. He knows and likes

you, so it will be all serene. It means your posting to 'I,' of course. Major Denton will be sorry to lose you, but it's inevitable. And, as you'll understand, it's wiser to post a newly-commissioned officer to another division. This is one of the most important tasks I could give you, Adair. Your appointment and transfer will appear in tomorrow's orders. Good luck—and, again, my congratulations!"

II

There are moments in life, great moments witnessing the realization of a cherished ambition or embarkation upon some fateful enterprise, when one prefers to be alone. This, to Hector, was one of them. He left the Superintendent at headquarters and, going to his room, tried to grasp to its full extent the meaning of what had just occurred. A wild exultation had hold of him and he was for the time being drunk with success—so drunk that he could not think. He wanted to drag himself out of this mental state and soberly to contemplate the situation.

Gradually his mood became less intense and he was able to con things quietly over, like a child lingeringly, one by one, over a string of new toys.

What did his Commission mean to him?

Firstly, it meant that the goal of all his lifetime and especially of the past ten strenuous, passionate years had been achieved, that his long fight for the leadership which had been his birthright was ended.

There was joy enough in that.

Secondly, he told himself, it meant that the second, more distant and ultimate goal of his life was now within reach if not within sight. The soldier-blood in him had always longed for the opportunity of great service to his country, for advancement and distinction, not from selfish motives, but from the pure, clean motives underlying the highest form of patriotism. 'Give me power, that I may use it for my country's good'; that was the sentiment animating him. The power, though not yet given him, was now close at hand.

The long, toilsome pilgrimage had brought him at last to the edges of the dawn.

There was also joy enough in that.

But thirdly—and perhaps, chiefly—it meant—Frances; not that Frances was now his, by any means. But he could stand up now before her father and say: ‘You wouldn’t listen to me before, because I was not an officer. I am an officer *today*. What is your answer?’

When Hector left Major Edginton’s house, he had suffered a broken-hearted agony far beyond any physical torment he had ever known. Injured pride, self-pity and, above all, outraged love had combined to harry him and he had tasted their torture as only strong natures can taste it in the first tragic shock of disillusionment. This agony had driven him out of Arcady early on the following morning without an attempt to say ‘Good-bye’ to Frances. It made itself more acute because it forbade him to tell Mrs. Tweedy what had happened, though he knew that she sensed the crash and he was longing to give way to his misery. It persisted in even fiercer form during the last few days at John’s, but during that time, in spite of it, he had forced himself to write a note to Frances for secret delivery by Mrs. Tweedy. At Winnipeg, on the return journey West, it laughed in bitter mockery in his ears when he saw his prophetic friends and was compelled to make a jest of the absence of the bride they had expected. And it reached its climax when, writing Mrs. Tweedy for news, he learned that the Edgintons had left Arcady, immediately after his own departure, for an address in New York given her by Frances—the only message the girl had been able to leave.

Gradually, however, the first acute pain passed, leaving a dull, lingering torment which in time became almost a part of himself. With this transition, he recovered something of his old buoyancy and determination. Destiny had made a mock of him but its trickery, after all, might be only temporary. He knew what he would do! He would redouble his efforts, by hard work and untiring study, to win his Commission. And then, when he had his Commission,—well, Major Edginton would relent, if Destiny so decided. And

if he did not relent—well, he would still have his old dreams of advancement to follow and would be on the threshold of achievement.

Having made up his mind, he at once set about the task with his usual vigour. The task was not difficult. Long before meeting Frances, he had made great progress. His officers were interested and helped him along in the kindest possible way. Eighteen months after his return from Arcady, six months previous to this day of days, Superintendent Denton had dropped him a hint of what was coming.

And today—today!—

He was happier than he had been since that fateful night now two years past.

He knew that, as far as Frances was concerned, he was not yet on dry land. Nevertheless, he had her address—the lifeline holding them together, without which he felt he would certainly have drowned. It was enough, today, to know that he might at last stand up before Major Edginton to claim Frances. He was determined not to admit any possibility of failure, to leave no room for fears that Frances might have moved again or, worse, forgotten him. She had not written him? That was nothing; the Major might have prevented her. It was sufficient that he had her address and that she had promised to wait till the end.

So then and there he wrote to her, telling her everything and saying: 'Please let your father know and, if there is any hope whatever, just advise me accordingly and I'll write to him. . . .'

The letter finished, stamped, sealed, his thoughts drifted to the work awaiting him near Broncho. He recalled the Commissioner's words: 'This needs a good man. . . . One of the most important tasks I could give you. . . .' and, recalling, realized that this was a marvellous opportunity. He felt a return of the exultation which had lately possessed him. The possibilities were endless. Let him but handle this situation successfully, receiving the distinction which would naturally follow and Major Edginton would probably change his mind soon enough!

III

With the spring came War.

In spite of all the efforts of the Commissioner and his followers, the Old Order, as he had prophesied, seeking to stave off the inevitable, broke out in arms against the New.

Lescheneaux, much excited, told the news to Hector.

"*Mon Dieu, mon leetle camarade!* She 'as com', *oui!* She 'as com', *en fin!* 'Ave I not said so all along? An' af-taire all we 'ave don' for dem, *les dam' scoun-drelle!* De way we 'ave slave', we 'ave toil', we 'ave sweat' an' freeze an' starve'—*sacre!* *Écoutez vous, 'Ect-eur!* De 'alf-breed an' de Indian—dey 'ave risen, *oui!*"

"What details?"

"Dey 'ave risen—risen everywhere! Dey 'ave attack' our fellows an' kill nine and wounded I don' know 'ow many more up dere near Goose River. De Commission-aire 'as march' wit' all 'ands, dey bring in outlyin' detachment' everywhere as can be spared. De Crees, de Assiniboines are up wit' de 'alf-breed, Calgary, Edmonton, all de Nort'-West is alarm'. An' we—we 'ave about t'ree-four 'ondred men, among twenty-t'irty t'ousan' Indian! By Gar, 'Ect-eur, I t'ink we in for 'ot time, *oui!*"

Rubbing his hands, the little Inspector grinned ecstatically.

"You're right, that's certain," Hector agreed. "But it won't last long. They're sure to send troops from the East. Why not before—eh?"

"*Oui!* But don' as' me. *Mais, restez tranquil!* We see plenty fon, all de same. But I'm sorry, ver' sorry—for you, *mon ami!*"

"Why for me?"

"*Eh? Mon Dieu,* I 'ave forgot to tell you de mos' important t'ing ov all! I leave you today an' tak' *mes enfants* along, too. You are to stay 'ere an' watch Bear Tooth. Me? Maybe I get into de beeg war. But you, *pauvre petit,* you mos' stay 'ere an' eider Bear Tooth rise an' eat up your leetle 'andful—goolp!—in one modful or 'e stay quiet an' you 'ave no fon at all. No alternative, *mon ami.* Nevaire

mind. You will 'old a position alone even more important den before!"

Hector looked at his companion blankly.

"Hold on!" he urged. "You're going away with all your men and I am to remain, watching Bear Tooth, with ten? Is that right?"

"*Absolument! Regardez—'ere is de order.*"

Hector looked at the document.

It was quite true. He was to be left alone to watch Bear Tooth; and the tribes were up through all the North-West!

The hell the agitators had brewed was boiling over everywhere. Bear Tooth was quiet but his braves might rise at any moment. The Commissioner looked to him to sit on the lid of that particular cauldron with his little detachment and see that they did not do so.

He took a deep breath.

Lescheneaux, seeing himself already engaged in hounding the rebels, slipped jubilantly away with his command that night and Hector was left alone.

IV

The uprising, as everybody knew, was the product of the campaign which had been continued throughout the winter, among the ignorant and inflammable half-breeds and Indians.

That winter had been a busy one for Hector. In co-operation with Lescheneaux, he had kept Bear Tooth's reserve under constant observation. Indian and half-breed scouts helped the Police in watching the camps, attending the meetings and patrolling. Hector did his best to allay the mischievous talk. The Indians knew they were being closely observed but they did not know that no man went to or from the reserve or spoke a single word of sedition without Hector's knowledge. Night and day, week after week, in thaw or blinding blizzard or bitter cold snap, Hector and his men were in the saddle—silent, inconspicuous but never-resting guardians of the Queen's peace on the great frontier.

Meanwhile, the shadow of revolt grew darker and darker over the land.

And now—the shadow had become substance. Broncho lay at Bear Tooth's mercy—unless Hector could hold his warriors in check.

It was a terrible position.

Fortunately he had two staunch allies: Bear Tooth himself and Father Duval.

Hector had kept in touch with Father Duval, whom he knew to be using all his tremendous influence to divert disaster. He had also sounded and consulted Bear Tooth. The chief, he felt, was reliable and loyal.

Between them, Hector felt, the situation might just possibly be kept in hand.

For the fortnight following Lescheneaux's departure, he was constantly on his feet and in constant communication with Father Duval and Bear Tooth.

His first move was to consult and advise Father Duval.

They met secretly.

"Whatever we do, Father," said Hector, "we must use tact, logic and persuasion. Threats? Useless!"

Father Duval smiled.

"Eh-h-, but you are a man af-taire my own 'art, Inspecteur. Dese *pauvres sauvages*—dey are joost children—*bébés*. Show a beeg, beeg stick—dey be'ave! *Vraiment!* But show a leetle stick—poof! Dey knock you down! Ef you 'ad all de Police be'ind you—ah! All right—shake de fist! But as you 'ave only ten men—ah! Talk quiet—ver', ver' firm but always no t'reat! *Mais, attendez!* Dese fellows are no fool. We give dem logic, as you 'ave said an' I bet you all stay quiet."

"My sentiments exactly, Father," Hector agreed. "Now, you are a man of peace; and they know it. There's not an Indian from here to the Arctic Circle that doesn't trust you, Father. Whereas—well, they know the Force is in arms against this revolt and they might think I was just talking to bluff them if *I* see them first. What I suggest, Father, is this: go to them, get them together, point out how we have helped them and treated them fairly always. Show them the treacherous side of this uprising. Tell them the mistakes the rebels have made. Then go on to point out the

power of the Great White Mother—how we've already avenged the Goose River affair—how an army is already on its way to crush the enemy—how the flow of troops will continue, thousands and thousands of Shagalasha, until the war is ended at any cost and the leaders of the rebels hanged. Don't forget the rope, Father. Then—"

"Den—*pour fini*,—tell' dem 'ow much wiser to stay on reserve, till de ground, sell to de Government an' be true to de Queen. Eh, *mon enfant*, I know! 'Ow you say? Count on me, count on me! *Mes pauvres petits! Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*"

"Then that's settled. I will stay away—it will be more diplomatic. Afterwards—well, we'll see how you get along first."

"*Bon, bon, bon!* I go. Pray for me!"

And Father Duval departed on his great mission.

After forty-eight hours of—for Hector—intense anxiety, Father Duval returned, victorious.

"I saw every-one, Bear Tooth an' all," the priest told Hector. "I talk joost as we agree, you an' me. We are not yet escap' from de wood, *vous-comprenez: mais, le bon Dieu*, 'e as bless our effort, *oui!* You go yourself now to Bear Tooth! You see."

"Father," said Hector, "the country owes you a great debt—"

"Could I leave *mes enfants* to go stray at de word of fools an' demons?"

In the meantime, things were marching steadily to a climax in the field. The number of rebels had increased. The Mounted Police had been driven out of their northerly posts. Troops were moving steadily Westward, from all Canada, to reinforce the little bands of settlers and Police in whose hands the safety of the country rested.

Would they be in time? Heaven alone knew.

In Broncho, Colonel Stern was organizing a column to co-operate with the soldiers when they arrived. Hector longed to be with him, so that he might bear an active part in the operations. But he could not leave the reserve without orders. To leave it at that moment, in any case, would have

been madness. The cauldron, despite Bear Tooth's pledge, was still bubbling. The dashing, brilliant role was not for Hector; his was the harder, less attractive part of mounting guard. Fate was cheating him out of the glorious opportunity of a lifetime. But he was too good a soldier to complain.

Suddenly came splendid news—a letter from Colonel Stern, 'through the usual channels,' offering Hector command of the body of scouts then in process of formation for work in the Broncho column.

This was the Colonel's way of showing his long-established affection for and confidence in Hector. The temptation was immense. Hector decided to see Father Duval and abide by his decision. He had been fretting out his soul for action; but without a clear conscience, it was—of course—impossible to leave.

"Father Duval, can you control Bear Tooth without me? Is it safe for me to go to Broncho?"

"*Mon enfant*," the priest smiled, "you 'ave don' your share. Today, Bear Tooth an' me—we 'old de 'ole tribe in our two fists—so! Go—and de Lord go wit' you!"

There was no doubt of it. Between them, they actually had kept the most dangerous tribe in the North-West in check for good and all.

"If you feel, as I do, that Father Duval is capable of dealing with the situation henceforward," Hector wrote to his chief, "I would recommend that Colonel Stern's request be granted."

This answer placed his fate in jeopardy. But he was honest to the last.

Came, after torturous suspense, the following:

"In view of Father Duval's opinion and yours, you will withdraw to Broncho with your detachment forthwith."

Conscience was satisfied and the Road to Glory laid open! When Hector told the men, they cheered like mad.

"Tak' good care yourself, *mon petit ami*!" said Father Duval. "An' don' worry about us no more!"

That night they marched to Broncho.

v

Broncho was in a turmoil. Already overcrowded with settlers, cow-punchers, loyal half-breeds and their several families from the surrounding district, it was daily becoming a richer prey for the bloodthirsty rebels. Appalling rumours kept it on the rack. Special trains, loaded to capacity with women, children and faint-hearted men, pulled out for the East and safety in an unending stream. The streets were full of galloping horsemen, raw bands of eleventh-hour recruits and long-faced citizens hastily organizing themselves for defence. Saloons, eating-houses, stores and stables talked War, War, War.

Through this turmoil, hailed as a troop of angels descended from Heaven to the rescue, Hector and his scarlet-coated policemen rode to Colonel Stern's headquarters. The Colonel, wearing a gunner's uniform of incredible age and an expression of the utmost calm, met them at the door.

He was obviously delighted to be back in harness.

"Well done, well done, Adair!" he exclaimed, returning Hector's salute. "You're the best thing I've clapped eyes on since I got here. Just the man I need—chose you myself! Come inside! Glad to see you—at last!"

In the office, the Colonel explained the plan of campaign—a push northwards of three columns, of which the Broncho crowd was one, as soon as the Commander-in-Chief was ready, to converge on So-and-So. The Colonel's lot was to consist of a squadron, under Hector, two battalions of militia from the East—'all the way from the lower Provinces, Adair—there's your united Canada!'—and a detachment of artillery—'Yes, they've given me a pop-gun!' The advance would take place very soon, as speed was essential if the northern settlements and Western Canada were to be saved from a general conflagration. The Colonel was having some difficulty in arming his men, with whom fire-arms had become unnecessary of late years, owing to the protection afforded the country by the Mounted Police; but that difficulty was in the course of solution.

"And I've an ideal Sergeant-Major for you; an old friend."

"An old friend?" Hector was puzzled. "Who—let me see—"

The Colonel's eyes twinkled under their deep thatch of eyebrow.

"Sergeant-Major Whittaker! You couldn't have a better man!"

"Whittaker! Well, I'm—; Jove, that's splendid! Is he here, sir?"

A short time later, these two, who had last met as Sergeant and senior N. C. O., were shaking hands as officer and civilian.

"Yes, sir, I came down right away," said Whittaker, smiling all over his bronzed hatchet face. "Fact is, I heard Colonel Stern was here organizing a column and—well, anyway, I'm like that old warhorse in the Bible, saying 'Ha! Ha!' among the Capt'ins. I smell the battle afar off an' there's no holding me. Once a soldier always a soldier, Mr. Adair!"

Things *were* looking up! With Sergeant-Major Whittaker and his little troop of constables to stiffen it, Hector could make such a corps out of the splendid raw material at hand as would write a new chapter in the history of frontier cavalry.

It was at this time that Hector was introduced to the machinations of the political press, with which he was to have a close acquaintance later on.

Newspapers from the East came in regularly, full of prophecy, criticism and advice, each more hysterical than the last. Issue after issue, blatantly headlined and editorialed by know-nothing party reporters fifteen hundred miles distant from the scene of action, reached the hands of Hector and his constables, uttering such things as these:

ARE THE MOUNTED POLICE ASLEEP?

IS THE COMMISSIONER AFRAID?

SOME DRIVING POWER NEEDED.

KOW-TOWING TO THE REBELS.

One day he saw his trumpeter tearing one of these papers to shreds, crying:

“Damn them! Damn them!”

“Never mind them, Mason,” Hector said. “All servants of the Government have to put up with such attacks. We’ll just show we’re too big to pay attention to them.”

But when he realized that these papers were believed infallible by the militia regiments and half the people of Canada, he found it hard to preserve that equanimity.

In a week of desperate work, Hector produced a body of over a hundred scouts drawn from the world’s best sources, of no uniformity but fully supplied and able, with its string of pack-mules and extra horses, to move independently of the main body, go anywhere, do anything and fight anyone on earth.

In ten days’ time, they received orders to advance. At the head of the column, cheered frantically by hysterical citizens, they swept out of Broncho.

VI

From the naked woods on the rolling brown ridge beyond the valley came the echo of the last lingering shots of the enemy. In the deserted rifle-pits which pocked the hillside lay many motionless forms, dark, dwarfed by distance. Two or three white-faced corpses sprawled on the open ground in front of the pits. One of them wore a red coat, which, in the afternoon sunshine, stood out startlingly, like a blot of blood, the one bit of colour in the entire picture. Near by was a dead horse, legs in air, repulsively grotesque.

Colonel Stern’s column had attacked and completely defeated the rebel right wing that morning in a position several hundred miles beyond Broncho. Covered by a weak rear-guard, the enemy were now rapidly retiring.

In the distance, out of range, the transport—heavy farm-wagons, light carts and pack-mules—were clustered. With them were Hector’s cavalry.

Colonel Stern stood with his staff close behind the firing-line, studying the enemy's country.

Utterly unflustered, he began to talk rapidly to his senior officers. They were all agreed. The time had come for a vigorous pursuit.

"Boy," said the Colonel to an orderly, "give Mr. Adair my compliments and tell him to come up here at once."

In five minutes, Hector joined his commander.

"Adair," the Colonel said shortly, "it's evident we've shaken 'em badly. A hard, merciless pursuit now may end everything. Are you ready to start?"

"At once, sir."

"And, oh—Adair. I didn't mention it before; but I had a despatch from the C. in C. this morning and it appears—" he whispered a smiling sentence.

"The man himself?"

Hector for once was shaken out of his calm.

"The man himself—the cause, the leader, the keystone of the revolt! Joined 'em three days ago, the General says. Chase 'em night and day; give 'em no rest; harry 'em; smash 'em; capture that bird and you'll be the hero of the whole campaign. It's the chance of a lifetime, Adair; but I'm glad you've got it."

For a moment Hector paused, his eyes far away. He thought of that night in Regina when he had seen in this uprising a marvellous opportunity. But he had never dreamed of it developing such an opportunity as this! For a moment he felt as if everything were already his—Frances —success—the world—

"I'll follow you, Adair."

"All right, sir."

To get back to his men was a matter of a few minutes. Rapidly he gave his orders:

"Trumpeter, the 'Fall In'—look sharp. Quartermaster, follow up with the pack-mules. Sergeant-Major, detail an escort. 'Tion! Number—"

The trumpeter rattled out the call. The men fell in, their horses plunging. The scouts swept off in front. Then, in single file, their scarlet-coated leader at their head, Hector's

dashing frontier cavalry circled the camp at full gallop, tore through the ranks of yelling infantry, waved a hand in farewell and thundered down the slope and away.

VII

In a wide and desolate expanse of open country patched with sloughs, Hector's men, after twenty hours of unceasing pursuit, were suddenly and definitely checked. They had lost the trail.

Gaining touch with the enemy soon after the start, they had maintained it all through the night, through the grey hours of the morning and so on till nearly noon. The night's pursuit had been fierce, wild work, like some mad vision of a disordered brain, fierce, wild work at a furious pace, over ridge and hill, round lake and wood, through brawling river, down broad valley and deep ravine and full of fearful, unforgettable sights and sounds: scouts on their knees, like apemen in the gloom, feeling the ground for telltale tracks left by the rebels; the rattle of sliding stones as the cavalry plunged along the steep face of a gully; distant shouts of the scattered enemy, trying to keep touch; loud shouts, near at hand, of warning—fear—command; strings of horsemen, glimpsed for an instant, gigantic and pitch black against the lighter blackness of sky; the faraway drum of many galloping hoofs, sensed rather than heard; the flash of rifles, darting from rock to rock; the swift glare of light on the face of a rebel scout, firing his last round home; horse and man dashed for a breathless moment in a sudden blaze, like a man and horse of living flame, as the nearest cowboy answered surprising shot with shot; and now and then, cleaving the darkness from some unknown source, the unearthly scream of a wounded animal, expressive of the hate and terror of it all.

Daylight found the pursuit still hanging on, though reduced in numbers and still pressing the rebels hotly, though splashed and drenched from head to heel, parched with thirst, racked with hunger, worn out and running short of ammunition. By that time the battlefield of yesterday and

Colonel Stern's column were alike far behind and they were alone on the verge of the great lake district to the north. But Hector drove his men tirelessly forward, with a merciless 'Push on!'—'Push on!'

And now the trail had been utterly lost for over an hour and they were checked, willynilly, for good and all.

With a little party to cover the operation, the scouts were working on a cast, in a wide circle, like questing hounds. Hector had with him some of the best scouts in the North-West and he was among the best of them himself; but they could not find the trail and all hands were near despair.

In this crisis, he would have sacrificed ten years of his life to have old Martin with him. But Martin Brent had been in his grave for years.

He had no-one like him to rely on.

The situation was agonizing to Hector. This was his first great experience as an officer and he knew that not only his own men but every man in the Police would judge his capacity as an officer by his present success or failure. Besides, Frances—his dreams of progress—everything he most desired was dependent on this one issue. He had built up a thousand visions with victory in this trial as their foundation. To fail now—after pushing his men and himself to exhaustion, after hounding the enemy on and on for twenty desperate hours—would mean the end.

Then, above even these things, there was the country. Its eyes were on him. Colonel Stern looked to him. He had it in his power to save a welter of bloodshed, to smash the revolt, to bring its leader to the scaffold—if he could only find the trail.

But the trail was lost.

He remembered, too, the newspapers, in his mind's eye saw headlines like these:

REBELS TOO SMART FOR POLICE.

INSPECTOR ADAIR'S FAILURE.

RESULTANT LOSS OF LIFE.

LET HIM RESIGN.

He heard, too, in imagination, the sneaking, mocking whispers of malice and jealousy condemning him on every side.

He went on searching relentlessly; but in his heart the spectre of defeat had already risen.

Till, all at once, the light came—sent, once more, by Destiny. With Mason, his trumpeter, he had moved off to a flank, on the slope of a hill, covered with small bushes, the crest just above them. Suddenly the bushes on the crest parted and an Indian appeared. Mason threw his carbine to his shoulder.

“Don’t shoot!” Hector roared.

He saw that the Indian was a squaw and unarmed.

But it was too late. The boy’s jumpy nerves had pulled the trigger.

“Oh,—!”

Hector ripped out an oath that none had heard him use before and ran up the hill.

He found the woman lying in the bushes. The bullet had gone straight through her chest. She was done for.

Hector, seeing that the damage was done, had now only one thought—to question her about the rebels.

He lifted her—she was small and light—kneeling and holding her in his arms. He did not yet recognize her.

Speaking her own tongue, he began.

“Where have you come from?”

She opened her eyes with a great effort and looked at him woodenly. A vague perplexity crept into her haggard, deathly face; a faint smile; then all her perplexity vanished and, smiling almost rapturously, she put out a trembling hand—touched his cheek—whispered—

In a flash, he knew her—in spite of her thinness, suffering, faded beauty. His mind went back through the mists of three—four—five years and more, back to Milk River, Fort Walsh and Sleeping Thunder’s teepee—

It was Moon.

He uttered a strange, inarticulate cry—struggled to speak—could not—

She touched his cheek a second time. Agony was in her smile, making it terrible.

"Oh,—they've killed—me," she said.

"Moon!" Hector burst out, "What are you doing here?"

She still smiled—the old sweetness always in her face—through tears of pain that dimmed her beautiful, soft eyes. Every word was an intense effort.

"So—you *have*—come," she whispered. "I stayed—behind—to meet you. I was—so tired—so tired—and Loud Gun—he beat me. I knew—you were—following us—everybody knew it, for—everybody—knows you. *You* will—not beat—me. You have always—been kind—to me. I thought, 'I can—go no—further. I will stay—behind—and go to him. And he—will protect me.' So I—stayed. That is why—I am here. I was waiting—till you came—near. I—thought I—would jump out at you—as children—do. I—thought 'How pleased and surprised he—will be.' But, oh—they shot me!"

Hector held her closer. A thin trail of blood trickled pitifully from the corner of her trembling, childish mouth. The sight pierced him. He took her shaking hand.

"Where is Loud Gun?" he asked, his voice like flint.

By this time the trumpeter and some of the men were standing near, a silent group, puzzled, unable to understand what the woman said but able to see that their leader had been deeply stirred. Hector barely realized that they were there.

"Loud Gun?—He is with—the rest of them—the rebels. He is—chief of the band—now. My father—is gone. He rides the ghost-trail. Had he—been—living, his people, my people—they would not—have been—led away—into this—cruel—madness. But—" she repeated, "he rides the ghost-trail. And I—will soon—O, I am happy!—I will soon be with him!"

"You say Loud Gun has been unkind to you?"

Hector's voice was trembling, though he tried hard to control it.

"At first—he loved me. But then—he—tired—of me. But now—all that is over; and I do—not—care."

The words came heavily, painfully, from her lips, like cripples, one by one. The blood from her mouth still trickled down. Hector tried to stop the thickly welling flow from the hole in her chest with his handkerchief but could not.

"Listen, Moon." He steeled himself for the effort. "Tell me—where have they gone?"

She looked at him, striving always to smile. But her eyes were already clouding, her voice and senses failing.

"Will—it—serve you—if I tell?"

He answered swiftly: "It will be the greatest service man or woman ever rendered me, Moon. And it will end this miserable, useless rising."

"So?" she said. "Then—I will tell—you. Why should I not—tell you? Loud Gun—and his—people—have cast me off. Then, why should I—not—tell you—whom I love—ah, yes I love—as much as—ever? They have gone—they have gone—"

He felt her slipping away and made a desperate attempt to hold her back.

"Yes, yes! Where have they gone? Quick, Moon—tell me!"

"They have gone—gone—that way." She pointed with her shaking hand. "They—rode—through—that slough—there—to hide the tracks—and down a little stream—on the other—side. So—for three hours—and then—for—"

"Yes?"

"For the—great lake—in the north. Its name—its name—"

"I know it!" said Hector. "I know it."

She had shown him the trail.

And she was fast nearing another trail—a longer trail—herself. He felt her clutch his hand convulsively.

"Then—I—*have* served you, after all!" Her voice was very weak but there was great joy in it. "I—could—not have—you for my own self; and you—would not let—me—be your servant then. But the Great—Spirit, He—has—been—so kind to me. He has—let me—aid you—serve you—when you—most needed me—and in the—end. Oh, you

of the gentle heart—see how your kindness to the—poor and lowly—brings you—a reward!”

Her eyes rested now with a vague longing on the heedless, bright blue sky, the dazzling sunshine, the long sweep of the empty hills and the slough, a sheet of silver. To renounce all this—and lose him with it! All the agony of all the partings and renunciations that have ever been was in that one wistful glance.

Hector’s heart—soft as a woman’s, as are the hearts of all really strong men—was breaking and this was more than he could bear. A slow tear coursed down his face. He did not heed it. But she saw it there.

“Tears—for me?” she said wonderingly. Again she smiled, the bravest smile he had ever seen. “Ah, do not weep for—me. I am happy—to—die—for—you—with you. It is—just as I—have always—wished.”

A moment more and the fierce grip of Death seized her. She felt it coming, shook convulsively, torment indescribable on her face—

“Moon!” Hector implored.

She opened her eyes—smiled again into his—

“Hold me—tight!” she whispered.

He gathered her into his arms.

The story was ended.

At last he set her down and was instantly back to the business in hand.

He shouted an order at the staring men and cleft the silence with a blast on his whistle that brought the others racing in.

“All right, Sergeant-Major—send the scouts off—this way! Follow up with the rest—follow me!”

Mason, the innocent cause of Moon’s death, came running up with the horses, recalling to Hector’s mind—Loud Gun.

Then, once more, but for the last time, the astonished trumpeter heard his leader ripping out most fearful oaths.

“I’ll settle him! By God, I’ll settle him!” he ended.

Savagely spurring his horse, he put himself at the head of the scouts and flashed off on the trail the rebels had taken.

Broncho was *en fête*—spreading herself. The uprising was over—every spark of revolt completely quenched. That afternoon, there was to be an official ‘welcome home’ to the city’s heroes.

At the head of the column forming for the march to the platform was Hector and his cavalry—a rejuvenated troop, happy as larks.

But Hector was more serious than the men had ever seen him.

“C. O. got the hump? Just look at him!”

His mind in a turmoil, Hector obeyed the order to march off. The Broncho band, of citizens of all ages, uniform caps their only regalia, burst into semi-harmonious strains and led the way through the crowd.

And the crowd—looked at the bronzed young officer on his noble horse, remembered his record—and worshipped.

Hector heard their Hosannahs thundering to the sky, saw men, women, children, all madly excited, swirling round him, waving innumerable handkerchiefs, flags, hats—and still floated in a world of dream.

They were grouped round the platform now. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Territories and his party appeared; ‘God Save The Queen’; a salute; hysterical cheering!

Colonel Stern, a wonderfully handsome figure, with his keen face, hooked nose and long moustaches, came riding up with his staff. Passing Hector, he smiled kindly; then joined the Lieutenant-Governor, who began a speech in his praise.

Bursts of cheering! The Lieutenant-Governor shifted to a new theme. Hector, still in a daze, caught snatches of these remarks.

“The dashing young leader . . . officer of the gallant and well-beloved Mounted . . . spearhead of the advance . . . exposed himself recklessly throughout . . . when the time came, swept fiercely in pursuit . . . engaged them finally at . . . where they were caught between the lake and . . . could not escape . . . though greatly outnumbered, smashed the rebels utterly . . . captured

not only the remnant . . . but their leader . . . head of the whole revolt . . . himself . . . thus single-handed bringing . . . campaign . . . swift and glorious conclusion . . . yes, Inspector Adair!"

Then a wonderful thing happened. The impatient crowd broke its bonds and instantly filled all the space about the platform. It rushed round Hector. He found himself suddenly walled in by a field of exultant faces and dimly realized that they were cheering him . . . cheering him. . . .

Over this heaving mass a voice suddenly threw a roaring word, hailing Hector by the name long given him by the Indians and sometimes by the civilians, in token of the strength and fearlessness which they considered him, the embodiment of himself:

"*Manitou-pewabic!*" shouted the voice. "*Manitou-pewabic!*"

Instantly the crowd took the cue and roared the name, sometimes the translation of the name, in one great tumult of sound:

"*Manitou-pewabic!*"—"Spirit-of-Iron! Spirit-of-Iron!"

For a moment, then, coming out of the clouds, Hector felt, for the first time in his life, the tremendous exultation of wide fame and brilliant success. This crowd, these cheers, were his. That name, that wonderful name, they had given him. In their way, those people represented all Canada. The whole country was applauding him. Destiny had given him greatness. He was no longer struggling to advance. He *had* advanced!

"Spirit-of-Iron!" thundered the crowd. "Spirit-of-Iron!"

Afterwards, those who had seen him returning their salutes, remarked that he had not once smiled.

If they had known the reason why! . . . They did not know.

The fact was that, the first wave of exultation past, the intoxicating drink turned to gall on Hector's lips, became a curse and a mockery.

Just before falling in for parade that afternoon, an orderly had handed him a sheaf of letters, his first mail since leaving Broncho to fight the rebels. Among the letters was one

which brought his heart to his mouth. It was his letter to Frances—returned 'dead' after wandering over half America.

On the envelope was stamped 'Address unknown.'

In the hour of success, Fate, after her playful manner, had kicked him off his pedestal and crushed him like a beetle.

The laurels had developed spines that lacerated his hands.

He had lost Frances, utterly lost her.

What did he want with this cheering?

But still the crowd yelled on tumultuously and the great moment lingered—the moment of universal acclamation—mocking him—glorifying him——

Spirit-of-Iron!

IX

Autumn dawned. The epic railway lay completed from sea to sea. Its last spike had been the last nail in the coffin of the Old Order. The dead heroes of the little war, who had made that victory possible, slept peacefully, heedless of the thunder of the vast tide of humanity now bearing down upon the plains for which they died—the tide which was the first wave of the iron-spirited nation to come.

BOOK THREE: *The Clash*

BOOK THREE: *The Clash*

Chapter I

I

On the open prairie outside the growing city of Broncho, in the heart of the cattle country, the Mounted Police held their Queen's Birthday sports.

Mrs. MacFarlane, not long made wife of Inspector MacFarlane, looked on the scene from her seat in the front row of the officers' marquee and felt herself quite intoxicated with the glamour of it all.

Mrs. MacFarlane was an American, brought up in the Eastern States and hence new to the West and particularly to such martial pageantry as this.

She was also an uncommonly pretty woman, small and graceful, with seductive eyes of baby blue, fringed with very long lashes; well marked and arched eyebrows; a mass of hair so fair that it was almost white; a little tip-tilted nose; and lips that seemed perpetually to ask for kisses. She had a voice which alternately cooed and purred and sometimes did both at once. Intensely feminine, she revelled in her frills and ribbons and exotic perfume, had always an eye for a good-looking man, craved masculine attention as a child craves candy, and, when any prospects of the kind were in sight, was alive to nothing else whatever. If attacked, she would instantly resort to tears. Altogether, she was of the type which some women call 'sweet' and others 'cattish.' Most men would call her 'pussy.' But she made her presence felt; and there was 'more in her than met the eye.'

No one could quite understand how a pretty woman of her stamp, who so admired physical beauty in men and was herself able to appeal to them after a certain fashion, had

come to marry a big, grumpy, bear of a fellow like MacFarlane. Some months before, returning from the East on leave, MacFarlane had electrified every man and woman connected with the Force by bringing with him this unknown beauty as his bride. How on earth had he managed it—when, even now, she clearly revealed her preference by furtively ogling all handsome men, even the constables? Never mind; she *had* accepted him. Some day, perhaps, when the novelty of her present life wore off and she had settled down to await Eternity in the rough dreariness of pioneer barrack life with MacFarlane for company—well—things might happen.

Time enough to think of these things *when* they came! At present, reclining in her chair, watching the sports with the dreamy little smile which she knew became her so well, she was perfectly content.

Beside her sat Mrs. Jim Jackson, wife of the now prominent rancher, a large, good-humoured lady of much animation, with an insatiable love for gossip. From Mrs. Jackson she learned much concerning the sports and the sportsmen.

"See that bunch over there—where the big, red-headed man is standing? They've got an outlaw," Mrs. Jackson explained—"a horse no one can ride, you know. That particular beast is a corker. He's killed two men already."

Mrs. MacFarlane shuddered.

"Then why do they use such a horse?"

"Oh, but they have to. Unless the horse is a real snorter, it makes the competition too easy. Donny, the man looking on—Corporal Donaldson, y'know, the Superintendent's teamster—can handle him, don't worry. He's one of the best rough-riders in the Force."

Amid roars from the spectators, Donaldson flashed past the marquee, the horse bucking furiously. Mrs. MacFarlane caught a glimpse of its devilish eyes and of the face of Donaldson. She caught Mrs. Jackson's substantial arm with a pretty terror.

"Oh, he'll be killed! He'll be killed!" she gasped. "And—he's actually smiling!"

"Why, that's nothing to Donny," Mrs. Jackson soothed.

"He's enjoying it. I've seen him stick till the blood ran out of his mouth and ears and the brute had jolted him insensible. No one can touch him unless it's Dandy Jack. *He's* a wonder. There he is! In the roping contest—last on the right!"

"Is *that* Dandy Jack?" queried Mrs. MacFarlane incredulously, singling out a young puncher in brilliant regalia, who looked as if he had just stepped from a cocoon and possessed the face of Sir Galahad. "But—but he's only a child! And just beautiful, Mrs. Jackson. Who is he? *Do* tell me!"

"He's an American, aged sixteen, no one knows where from—originally. Landed in at my husband's ranch one day, dressed just as you see him now, a regular dream, and asked for work. Jim thought he was some romantic kid tenderfoot. '*You* ride?' he says. 'Listen,' said Dandy Jack, 'if I show you, will you take me on?' 'Sure,' said Jim. So young Jack climbs up on the cross-bar over the corral gate. 'Drive your worst horse under here—no, never mind saddle or bridle. I don't want 'em.' As the horse ran under, didn't Jack drop onto his back and ride him out? So my husband naturally took him on. And he's been in this country ever since."

"But how wonderful!" sighed Mrs. MacFarlane, gazing adoringly on the young puncher. "Do tell me more!"

Mrs. Jackson, thus encouraged, chattered on.

"He looks a perfect angel, but *my* dear—the language that boy can use! He's the most original cusser west of the Mississippi. They say he had to cross the line because he killed three men in the States—brutes who wiped out his father, mother and sisters—a feud of some kind. The sheriff was a friend of theirs, so he had to hit the trail for Canada or swing. But that's just a story. It can't be true, or he wouldn't be busting horses for the Force now—that's his job."

"Oh, I hope it's true! I hope it's true!" sighed Mrs. MacFarlane. "And now *do* point out the new C.O. You know, I haven't met him yet. Mac's jealous—you've no idea! Of course, he only arrived yesterday, but still——"

"Do you see that very tall, straight man, joking with your husband? Well, that's him!"

"Is *that* him?" 'Dandy Jack' was instantly forgotten. "Oh, but—but, my dear! I simply must meet him right away. Really, Mrs. Jackson, never——"

Mrs. MacFarlane, completely carried away, concentrated her attention on the new C.O. and was instantly brought to her figurative knees.

It was not merely his superb physique and its effect in brilliant uniform which gave her the feeling that she was in the presence of one unconquerable—a master of men, a builder of empires. It was his face—the face of a man still in his prime, but not to be measured in years. He might have been thirty or thirty-five, but was probably just on the right side of forty. To a strong regularity of feature, years of hardship and exposure had given an intense bronze and a network of stern clean lines, lending the face great character and nobility without adding much to its age. The man's smile, she thought, would have melted stone; but he did not smile often. Otherwise, there was more than a hint of sadness in his serenity. Once he glanced in her direction and she thrilled under eyes that were like the frosty blue of mountains seen from a great distance.

Till that moment, Mrs. MacFarlane thought, she had never set eyes upon a Man.

Mrs. Jackson was babbling away. She silenced her with an impatient gesture.

"But—tell me about *him*," she insisted. "He must be awfully interesting."

"He *is*. Let's see—well, now, first of all, you must know he's a great friend of your hubby's. Why, I thought he'd have told you! Oh, yes—great friends. They were in the ranks together. The men love him and would follow him anywhere. He's about six months senior to and a step higher than Mac. Did brilliantly in the revolt—seven—ten years ago. Since then he's just mounted steadily. It wasn't long before he'd got a district. And they've transferred him up and up all the time. His coming here is really a promotion.

Broncho's one of the best plums going. You'd think he was a god, the way people look at him."

"I'm not surprised," murmured Mrs. MacFarlane, under her breath. "Go on, dear."

"He's supposed to be a fearful martinet. Jim says he worships Duty and says his prayers to Discipline. They send all the tough nuts of the Force to him, and *my* dear, he *cracks* 'em. The extraordinary part of it, Jim says, is half of it's done by kindness. Imagine, my dear, kindness! But the other half—wow! You know, 'gentle persuasion first and, if that fails, the torture chamber.' Naturally, it seldom fails."

Mrs. MacFarlane asked the question which for five minutes had trembled, wings spread, on the tip of her tongue.

"Is he—married?"

"No," answered Mrs. Jackson promptly. "Nor even engaged. Curious, eh? Personally, I think there's something mysterious about him—desperate love affair in his youth, jilted or something. But Jim, who's known him twenty years, says positively 'No.' Never cared for women at any time, Jim says. But I've my own ideas—nothing to go on, of course—just guesswork. Certainly he hasn't a thought or glance for a woman now. Perfectly sweet but thinks only of his work. I don't believe the woman lives who can move him!"

"I—*wonder*," Mrs. MacFarlane said softly. Her eyes were shining. "You must introduce me."

The sports over, the usual prize-giving and speeches followed. The Lieutenant-Governor led off in 'short but happy vein.' Followed Mr. Steven Molyneux, M. P. for Broncho in the Dominion House.

His speech was clever, humourous, apt and obviously sincere.

Hector watched and listened to Mr. Molyneux with intense interest. Until that afternoon he had never met Molyneux. He saw and heard him now for the first time.

The speaker was a man of about fifty, with a neatly trimmed beard. Hair, beard and moustache were black, well powdered with grey. Once lean and hardy, he was just

beginning to incline towards the soft fullness of inactivity and advancing years. His voice was ordinarily pleasant and he spoke slowly and impressively, but in addressing the crowd his delivery was hard and rapid, giving him an air of alacrity which went down well with a western audience. He was well dressed in the style common to the country, with a low white collar and a bow tie. In his hand, as he spoke, he waved a broad-brimmed felt sombrero and a much-chewed cigar, to lend force to what he said.

The Lieutenant-Governor spoke to Hector suddenly.

"A good speaker, Molyneux. Do you know him?"

"No, sir, I do not. Do you?"

"Only officially. A shrewd man."

Molyneux finished his speech and took a seat amid a patter of applause. Inspector MacFarlane—a heavier, more stolid MacFarlane than the Sergeant MacFarlane of twelve good years before—was on Hector's right. MacFarlane had been stationed in the Broncho district a long time. He should know Molyneux. Hector began to question him in an undertone.

Molyneux, it appeared, was one of those human sky-rockets common to new communities. Rising from unknown depths with the starting of a Broncho livery stable three or four years before, he had climbed rapidly into the western firmament to blaze suddenly forth as a prominent citizen and a candidate for the House at Ottawa. No one knew much about his past and very few cared. In a young country, where the oldest old-timer can count the years of his citizenship on two or three hands, where the scanty population is largely nomadic and where the vast majority concentrate exclusively on making use of their opportunities, a man's credentials are seldom demanded and those he offers are accepted as genuine. Mr. Molyneux, coming from nowhere, had simply set up business. Cash rolling in had given him good standing. Popularity and more cash had given him his nomination. Then came the election—and there you were!

"Doesn't he remind you of anyone?"

"No, sir," said MacFarlane, surprised. "Why?"

But Hector did not answer. He was busily delving into the pigeon-holes of that tenacious memory.

Strip off fifteen years—so his thoughts ran—from the body, with the fat that goes with it; take away the grey and the dye—it's probably dye—from the hair and most of the wrinkles from the face; shave off the beard; put him in riding rig, on a spirited horse; and——

Vague trouble stirred in his mind as he looked at the politician—almost a sense of coming conflict.

He remembered the keen-faced, lean, sinewy, tawny-headed man with the smooth ways and false professions of friendship, with whom he had waged war many years before; remembered how that man had sought his life, sent Chester to his death and Wild Horse to the gallows; remembered, above all, without fear—though perhaps this memory was mainly responsible for his vague foreboding—the note left behind by that man when he drove him out of Canada:

'You have won this time. But I will win yet. I owe you my ruin and, if it takes me twenty years, I'll get even. Remember, I'll get even, if it takes me twenty years.'

The voice—somewhat disguised—the eyes—which could not be disguised—and a dozen smaller things; these told him, against every point of reason, against all his better judgment, that—the Mr. Steven Molyneux of today was the Mr. Joseph Welland of long ago!

As the crowd left the field after the National Anthem, Mrs. Jackson introduced Hector to Mrs. MacFarlane.

II

On the morning following the sports Corporal Donaldson, the Superintendent's teamster, came 'round to Hector's quarters in the Police barracks at Broncho with his smart turnout, a shining two-seated trap drawn by two magnificent roans.

"Drive to Mr. Molyneux's office," Hector ordered.

"Yes, sir," said Donaldson. "Giddap there, John A.! Hup there, Laurier!"

The equipage bowled majestically out at the gate on the road to Broncho.

Hector had decided overnight to call on Molyneux for several reasons. His chief object was to ascertain, by diplomatic methods, whether, as the new commander of the Broncho district, he could rely on the support of Mr. Molyneux, as M. P. for that constituency, in all matters wherein that support was to be legitimately expected. His secondary object—to a certain extent dependent on the first—was to discover, to the best of his ability, whether Mr. Joseph Welland and Mr. Steven Molyneux were actually one and the same.

Upon the outcome of his visit, much would depend. In steering his course through the uncharted waters ahead, it was essential for Hector to know from the outset whether the local M. P. could be counted friend or foe; and he was taking no chances.

Hector had already heard certain allegations concerning Molyneux. He intended, during the interview, to test their truth.

When the Mounted Police first came into the country—these were Hector's reflections as he sat in the trap—the Northwest had been free of a certain great influence now beginning to make itself strongly felt. That influence might be summed up by the one word: 'politics.' The population was small; it was too busy to care about the details of government; and it was glad to leave those details in the hands of the authorities appointed by the Crown, who were the instruments of a kind of benevolent autocracy. But, as time went on, the population increased and became more settled, the standard improved and British democracy demanded that the people should have a greater voice in the Territories. The years following the construction of the railway had brought these powers with them. The people began to send their own representatives to the local legislature and to Ottawa. The benevolent autocracy passed away and the double-headed monster lying beneath the surface of all representative government began to worm its way from the East into the

Northwest—the monster politic with the twin heads, ‘favoritism’ and ‘pull.’

Climbing gradually upward through this period of expansion, Hector, eyes and ears open, had come to a full realization of just what the change meant and could mean. By observation, he had learned something of the tremendous power possessed by politicians and especially of its decisive effect, for good or evil, on all matters affecting the government of the country. By watching the experiences of others and by enduring similar experiences himself, he had discovered that politicians can make or break not only any individual or group of individuals, no matter how prominent, no matter how worthy or efficient, who chance to be members of a government service, but even a whole department—an institution—worst of all, a regiment. And he had at last discovered that the life of such an individual, especially if he holds high authority, is apt to be one long fight for the preservation of himself and his subordinates from the machinations of the monster politic.

From this had risen the further knowledge that, in dealing with politicians, the personally helpless crusader must remember the old battle-cry, ‘He who is not for us is against us’—that the officer fighting for his corps under the terrible handicap of an oath binding him to obey political authority, must do everything possible not only to deal with the enemies already threatening it, but to prevent other politicians from joining the hostile alliance, even descending, if necessary, to the bitter humiliation of ‘bootlicking.’

All this Hector had learned in his steady progress up the ladder. And that was why he found it necessary, this morning, to visit Molyneux.

Had he not been so utterly bound up in his work, had the good of his corps been further from his heart, he might have left Molyneux to declare himself at leisure. But for almost a decade now he had thought of nothing but Duty and Regiment. The day which had witnessed his public christening as ‘Spirit-of-Iron’ and had brought back his letter to Frances had marked a new era for him—an era when, convinced that his destiny lay along a lonely path without

a woman's love to brighten it, he had given himself with renewed ardour to his country. Changelessly true, certain that he could never care for anyone but Frances, he had waited, hoping always that she might re-enter his life, until the creeping years had killed the last remaining flicker of hope. But, though his faith in her had never wavered, though he always felt that she would have come to him had she been able, the belief had steadily grown upon him that, after all, she had not been meant for him. If he could not have Frances, he wanted no-one. With this in mind, he had plunged headlong into his work, making it his absorbing interest. Today—except for occasional moments of fierce regret—he thought of nothing else. Today, as a result, he held the reputation Mrs. Jackson had given him.

But these years had brought him face to face with no tremendous personal issue. Thousands of little problems had confronted him in the ordinary course of duty and he had so dealt with them all. Nothing in the nature of something predestined—an immense test, a vast struggle involving, say, the whole course of his existence or the progress of the country—had appeared to try him.

He was wondering now if all that had passed had been merely leading up to this issue. In plain words, was his big fight to be against—Welland? Had the events of fifteen years before, which had laid the foundations of a lifelong enmity, been as a prelude to a tremendous drama in which Welland—in the guise of the politician, Molyneux—and himself, as the champion of straight dealing—were to come together in terrific conflict?

“Who-o-a-hup, here!”

The trap, after speeding through the fierce sunshine down the long, unpaved streets between the wooden shacks, past the bleached hotel, the banks, the red saloons, had pulled up before a pretentious building sheathed in imitation stone—weakness dressed up as strength, falsehood as truth. The nicely polished window bore the legend:

STEVEN MOLYNEUX

FLOUR AND FEED CATTLE DEALER
MORTGAGES MONEY TO LOAN

A moment later the M. P. and the Mounted Police officer—craft and honesty—politics and patriotism—sat face to face.

The interview was apparently amiable. Hector kept himself keyed up to the pitch of vigilance, studied the politician's face closely and tried to trap him into betrayal.

Molyneux, without gushing, was cordial. He offered Hector a cigar. As they lighted up, Hector opened the ball.

"Having just assumed command of the district, Mr. Molyneux, I called to pay my respects to the local M. P. There was no chance for us to chat yesterday."

His smile was disarming.

"Quite so, Major. Glad to see you. Beautiful day, isn't it? How long have you been here?"

"Only since the day before yesterday."

"Ever been in Broncho before?"

"Not since the revolt."

"Oh, yes. You were the hero of that affair."

"Not at all. Luck was on my side. You're a newcomer, I think?"

"Yes, comparatively. About three years now."

"You got in by a big majority, Mr. Molyneux. You must be popular."

"I suppose I am." Molyneux flashed a keen glance at him. "It takes it to get in nowadays."

"Yes—and to stay in. Of course, you're a Canadian."

"You bet—Maritime Provinces."

"New to the West?"

"No. Spent years in the Western States—even before the railroad."

"Indeed? Ranching?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the—Macleod country?"

Again the politician's eyelids flickered. But Hector met his gaze unflinchingly.

"You see, I spent a lot of time there myself."

"Never been there in my life," said Molyneux.

"A grand country. I would have liked to have been posted to that district, I think."

"Oh?"

"Yes," asserted Hector. "I know the people well there. Besides, I heard they didn't want me here."

"Didn't want you here, eh?"

"Yes. In fact—well, it's been said that *you*——"

"*Me?*"

"Yes—idiotic, isn't it? But it has been said that *you* were against my coming."

"Oh, nonsense, Major."

"Of course it is. I'm glad you're behind me. I never doubted that you were. It makes things so much easier—and, of course, safer."

"But—but—I tell you, Major Adair, you don't know what we M. P.s have got to stand for! Why, you'd think that the moment a man tacks 'M. P.' after his name he becomes a crook of the first water."

"Yes—strange, isn't it? Never mind, Mr. Molyneux. Your word is good enough for me."

Molyneux puffed angrily at his cigar.

"We're going to get on well, I feel sure," Hector went on. "I feel as if I'd known you years already. Together, we can do wonders. I want the Police here to be safeguarded from the attacks of unscrupulous politicians—members of the other party, for example. The senior officers are united in this desire. It's pleasing to know I can count on you."

Molyneux looked at Hector solemnly—a hard look in his eyes.

"That's right, Major. As long as they do their duty and the administration in this district is efficient, they can count on me. And I've lots of power, Major—lots more than some people think. I control a great deal of organized——"

Was there a threat beneath this assertion? Hector refused to see it.

"Thank you, Mr. Molyneux," he said, rising to go. "And you can count on me to fight any attempted political inter-

ference in my district tooth and nail. Make the mess your home if you want to. Goodbye."

Their eyes met; then their hands.

"Goodbye, sir, goodbye!"

Hector was absolutely convinced now. Welland, after hiding himself for years in the States, had ventured back to Canada. Today he was Mr. Steven Molyneux. And Mr. Steven Molyneux had not forgotten.

With the closing of the door on the Superintendent, the politician's face changed. He pitched his cigar away savagely.

A fierce thought was lacerating him:

Had Hector discovered his identity?

In his own mind, he was almost certain that he had.

Much depended on the question. The memory of the ruin Hector had brought upon his former plans just when they were at the point of fulfilment was still bright within him. The pangs and disappointments of his struggle to advance under a new name in a new country, in constant fear of being detected and denounced, still made themselves felt. Venturing back to Western Canada when he thought it safe, in order to avail himself of the country's greater opportunities for acquiring power and wealth and to work up at the same time to a position whence he might easily crush Hector, as he had sworn, he had endured a further struggle of three years' duration, a struggle which, but for Hector, had been unnecessary; and this struggle was too recent to be forgotten. If Hector had actually seen through his disguise—a disguise so perfect that it had completely deceived all others—even the old-timers who had known Joe Welland—then, not only his own future was at stake, but the retribution he had promised himself would be denied him. Hector would unmask him, have him brought to trial, utterly break him and, in so doing, save himself. Had he held his hand so long, awaiting his chance to make Hector's fall the more terrible, only to be caught in his own trap?

Altogether, Mr. Welland alias Molyneux was in a very pretty panic. He meant to smash Hector, anyway. It now

behooved him to act quickly. As long as there was the least likelihood that Hector had discovered him, he could not rest. He decided to put the wheels instantly into motion.

III

*I am the voice of War and Fame,
 Of Truth and Might and Chivalry.
 I am the soul, I am the flame
 Of all that heroes love to see.
 I hailed the day when Rome was born,
 I watched the ancient Peoples rise,
 I sang a song of laughing scorn
 When Dissolution closed their eyes.
 Supreme were they one little day
 And then—their glory passed away!
 Their lips are dumb, their suns are set—
 My voice, my voice is ringing yet!*

*In every age, in every land,
 When fierce and fell the battle grew,
 I bade the hard-pressed army stand,
 I steeled the yielding line anew!
 I charged the breach, I drew the sword,
 And, when the fateful hour was come,
 Above the storm I spoke the word
 That hurled the howling squadrons home!
 In red retreat, in dread defeat,
 When Life is Death, when Death is sweet,
 When Valour reaps its golden yield,
 My voice, my voice controls the field!*

*I am the voice, the brazen voice,
 The ardent voice of States and Kings.
 Let fools and dreamers cast their choice
 With milder music, softer things—
 The mistress, I, that heroes love,
 I sing the songs they leap to hear.
 A guardian spirit, poised above,
 I serve the Soldier. Year by year,*

*By day, by night, 'tis my delight
To guide his eager steps aright.
He lives—or dies—howe'er I will.
My voice, my voice directs him still!*

*And when he sleeps at last
Under the stainless Flag his hand defended
On Death's dark camping-ground—
The battle past,
The long march ended—
Mourning his loss with dirging fifes and drums,
His comrades fire the harmless round
And silence follows—Then my moment comes
And, note by note, with music sadly splendid,
The last to speak, my grief to tell,
My voice the final tribute pays,
Shatters the hush—and says
"Farewell! . . . Farewell!"*

'The Song of the Trumpet,' recited with immense fervour by the author to the accompaniment of a 'flourish off' between verses, though of the type at which soldiers are apt to sneer, began with the audience's sympathy and ended in tumultuous applause. Mrs. MacFarlane, in the front row—she was always in the front row—turned rapturously to Inspector Cranbrook, her nearest companion, who, in his whimsical way, was entertaining her.

"Wasn't that just—delightful?" she cooed, flashing him a dazzling glance. "Now—*who* was that? Isn't he handsome? My! I never can understand how you get men like that in the ranks of the Police. Most policemen are *so* common."

"You forget this is no common corps," Cranbrook laughed.

"That's quite smart!" she laughed, in return, patting his hand coquettishly. The action stirred Cranbrook strangely. "But tell me about him. He speaks like a gentleman—English; and he *can* recite. He seems very popular, too."

"Yes, he's not bad-looking. I should think he's public

schools—Eton, Harrow, y'know. He was in my division at Edmonton a year ago. Name's Humphries—a buck constable. Quite a card—rather wild, I'm afraid, but humourous all the time. Of course, he's got a past—must have."

"A woman?" she questioned quickly.

He flushed a little.

"I suppose so. He's too fond of 'em, I'm afraid."

"*Can* one be too fond of a woman?" she cooed.

"It depends on the woman—*of* course!" he answered with a touch of gallantry. "There are other things—cards—and—er—" Suddenly realizing that he was playing traitor to his sex and also touching on matters best left alone, he switched abruptly to a former line. "Yes, he can recite, as you say. Writes 'em all himself, too!"

"*No*—really? *How* romantic!"

"Yes. Oh, he's rather unique. Does conjuring tricks, plays the guitar, composes his own music for his own songs, and spouts Latin when he's—when he's under the weather."

Mrs. MacFarlane clasped her hands in an ecstatic and calculated gesture.

"O-o-h! I do hope he comes on again."

"Oh, he'll come on again."

The conversation flagged. Mrs. MacFarlane, for the twentieth time, cast furtively anxious eyes 'round the crowded room, with its row on row of laughing, eager men and girls, of mingling black and white and scarlet—scarlet—scarlet, the colour which made her tingle from head to foot. This was the C. O.'s concert—a special concert to welcome the new Superintendent, now with them seven days. Why was he not here?

As a matter of fact, he *was* there! Had she arrived earlier—the desire to make a sensational entrance plus natural laziness had made her late—she would have seen Hector in the forefront. Unexpectedly called away, he had now returned and was at that moment chatting with Inspector Forshaw, his adjutant, in a corner, on the very subject of Humphries, the entertainer.

"That man who just recited, Forshaw," Hector enquired. "Who is he?"

"That, sir?" Forshaw, a short, good-humoured Englishman with intensely bright eyes and a round, ruddy face, beamed and smiled. People always smiled at mention of Humphries. "That's a new man to this division. Name's Humphries. Fact is, sir, he's not much good—not exactly a bad hat, but wild and unreliable. Gentleman gone wrong—you know the sort, sir. The usual story, I expect—*younger son—felt his oats—a girl.*"

The C. O. smiled.

"I'm sorry. He looks whole-wool. I wonder if we can't snatch the brand from the burning?"

Between Forshaw and Hector had sprung up immense sympathy. Forshaw was not an old hand in the Force and his service had not brought him into contact with Hector—they had met for the first time a week ago. But he was a man of insight, who knew Hector by repute and had with him much in common.

He immediately saw that the C. O. had become unusually interested in Humphries.

"Fact is, sir, they've been wondering the same thing at Regina. They've transferred him to us, sir, as a sort of last resort, for you to discipline him."

Hector nodded again. The reformation of 'bad hats' was his specialty.

"I see. Well, perhaps I can manage him."

"I'm certain you can, sir," said Forshaw quickly. "You know, he's clever, in his own way—probably a lot in him. Rather extraordinary humourist. The story goes,"—the Adjutant's face radiated merriment—"that he was a remittance man before he enlisted. You know what *that* means!"

"So that's the style of fellow he is?" said Hector. "Well, bring him in, in the morning. Mr. Humphries had better make my acquaintance before it's too late."

Hector parted with the Adjutant and walked forward. Mrs. MacFarlane saw him coming. Cranbrook had left his seat on an errand for her. Her heart beating curiously, all eyes upon her, she beckoned Hector to the vacant place. He smiled abstractedly and sat down.

The next number started. It was a comic song of the

red-nosed variety. Mrs. MacFarlane hated the song, the comedian, the vulgar crowd that roared at the jokes. She wanted to talk to Hector. But her companion was laughing quite as heartily as the rest of them and she felt obliged to conceal her annoyance and laugh with him.

The number concluded, Hector turned to her.

"You didn't seem to care for that song, Mrs. MacFarlane."

She started.

"What amazing insight you've got, Major!" she declared. "I thought I'd fooled everyone."

"You're a clever actress," he said, quietly bantering. "But I saw through you."

"It's just terrible to be so transparent! That's why I'm always natural."

"It's the best policy," said Hector gravely. "Besides, when one is so naturally charming——"

The gallantry caressed her and, pussylike, she purred.

"Thank you, sir! Really, for a woman-hater——"

"A woman-hater? Who gave me that reputation?"

He was looking at her keenly with just a hint of amusement. Unable to fathom his mood, she compromised.

"Oh, there just seems to be an impression 'round—nothing definite—that you don't care for the sex. But I—just guessed."

"*You're* the penetrating one *now*, madam!" he jested. "As a matter of fact, you're quite wrong. Truly, I *don't* hate women."

"Honest In'jun?" she smiled. "Then"—dropping her voice—"why have you avoided *me* so often?"

"*Avoided—you?*" Real astonishment seemed to move him. *He* was at a loss now. Was she serious? "Oh, but you're joking."

"No, I'm not," she pouted. "You've passed me on the parade-ground dozens of times without a word. You've seen me at the window when you inspect in the morning——"

"Mrs. MacFarlane"—he still smiled but his tones were earnest—"if I've ever passed you without speaking, it was

because I was in a hurry. And you know, of course, on parade——”

“I know, I know,” she laughed reassuringly. It was not safe to go too far; and the limit had been reached. “But don’t crush me more than you can help. Nothing hurts a woman more than to be utterly overlooked by a handsome man.”

Her eyes fawned over him. He deliberately let the compliment pass.

“At least you’ll admit, now, I’m *not* a woman-hater?”

“U-m-m!” She was still doubtful. Then, insinuatingly, with a languid glance, “Perhaps not. But your heart—has it ever been——?”

He read the rest: ‘Has your heart ever been given in vain?’ This was an outrageous probing into a hidden wound no-one had ever dared before. After the first shock, an impulse to put her violently in her place, as he well knew how to do, flashed upon him. But he was too chivalrous for that—and besides, it would betray his secret. So he answered with a smile:

“No, never.”

“Never?”

She lifted her eyes and cooed the word. Cleopatra caught Mark Antony by such methods.

“Never.”

“Oh, I can’t believe that. Major, you were made—just made—to be a hero of romance.”

“Do you think so?”

He was ironically amused.

“Yes, I do. Many’s the pretty woman who has kissed *your* feet.” Figuratively speaking, it was quite true, and Hector knew it. She laughed merrily, a hand on his arm. “Listen: I’m going to do something no-one’s ever had the grit to do before!”

“You’ve done that already.”

She was entertaining him, in a way.

“Have I? Oh, good. Well, listen—how your men would admire me if they knew what I presumed to say!—but it’s for your *good*. Major, don’t be a monk—a hermit. When

a pretty woman comes along, don't shut your eyes. Pretty women and handsome men are *made* for one another!"

Her intense womanliness, her warmth, brightness, colour, perfume, were very near him. Despite himself, he felt their presence and a hint of their allurements. He was a strong man, physically——

But he answered, rather stiffly:

"Thank you!"

The concert rolled on. She looked at her programme:

'Song: accompanied by guitar: 'A Game of Cards.' Constable Humphries.'

"Oh, it's that sweet thing again!" she breathed in Hector's ear. "Don't you think he's wonderful?"

"Very!"

The C. O., from Olympus, to please her, looked down upon the Marquis, his wayward servant, and tossed him a kindly though untruthful word.

In a flutter of applause, the Marquis climbed easily and confidently to the platform. He was a slim young man, black-haired and bronzed, with a short black moustache, beneath which his teeth flashed, white and even, when he smiled. His features were very straight and regular. His eyes looked upon the audience with a kind of bitter humour, as of one who has tasted Life's dregs and bravely bluffs that he has liked them. One glance at the Marquis told Mrs. MacFarlane that every word she had heard of him was true.

He carried a guitar and wore the plain scarlet tunic, blue breeches with yellow stripes and top-boots of a constable.

Dropping carelessly into a chair in the centre of the platform, and smiling sardonically, he began to sing and play. He had a quiet baritone which he used as only an artist can. The tune was the strangest affair, whimsical, yet full of tragedy and the guitar laughed and wept by turns in his mobile hands.

All the irony of broken hearts, false pledges, loves outraged and forgotten, was in the song, the music, the agonized but laughing voice:

*The maid was fair as a maid could be—
 Queen of a hundred hearts was she—
 And out of the shuffling pack she knew
 She drew a suitor she thought might do
 (A common habit of flighty maids).
 The lucky card was the Jack of Spades—
 As poor as a rat but fair of face,
 A humble fellow who knew his place,
 So she gave him her hand when he made his plea,
 Thus raising the fool to an ecstasy.*

*But another person lived in the pack,
 The handsome, rollicking Diamond Jack—
 I think you'll find, when my tale you've heard,
 The Knave of Diamonds the better word.
 It's easy to see how the tricks turned out,
 For Diamonds are trumps the world about.
 She flung the Jack and his ring away,
 Which wasn't exactly the game to play,
 And, crushed and broken, she left him there—
 But—what in the Deuce should the Lady care?*

Then slowly, on a dying note of laughter, the last line was repeated, to trail away into silence:

—What in the Deuce should the Lady care?

And in a flash the Marquis was off the platform.
 "Well, what a funny song!" Mrs. MacFarlane declared, applauding vigourously. "I'm sure there's a lot in it, Major. Probably it refers to something in his past—don't you think so?"

"Undoubtedly."

Again the ironical note struck her.

"You're laughing at me," she sulked prettily. "You shouldn't!—if we're going to be the good friends we ought to be."

Before Hector could reply, MacFarlane came up. He was obviously throbbing with jealousy.

Mrs. MacFarlane read his mood and was secretly amused.

She loved to torment him. But she made no reference to his annoyance.

"So glad you've come, old Mac," she said, hand outstretched.

Though he had interrupted her *tête-à-tête* with Hector, she forgave him. She felt that she had done a good night's work already.

In the morning Hector interviewed the talented Marquis and warned him to be a good boy. The Marquis promised that he would.

Chapter II

I

The Superintendent's servant, Constable Blythe, was laying out his master's mess uniform. The hour was six o'clock in the evening. A fortnight had passed since the holding of the concert.

Constable Blythe was a man of middle age and not ill-looking, originally hailing from some one of Her Majesty's far-flung Dominions—no-one knew which. Like many other Mounted Policemen, he had adventured into a thousand strange places and a dozen queer trades before joining the Force. Of these earlier phases of his history, little was known. But full details of his service in Her Majesty's forces, which he had embellished for many years in other climes, were available to those who sought them. And Blythe, though of a naturally silent disposition, had no aversion to furnishing these details. In fact, when introduced to the riding-school, he had proclaimed them at full voice. The horse had gently removed him.

"Here, I thought you said you could ride?" thundered the riding master.

"What, me?" shrieked Blythe indignantly. "I'm a marine, Gord boil yer, not a cent-ure!" (He possibly meant 'centaur').

Result: brought up before the C. O.—who happened to be Hector—for using insubordinate language to his superior officer.

"I can't ride, sir!" he had pleaded tearfully—for a Blythe, he was at all times the most lugubrious man in the world—"They don't have 'em on board ship. I'm a Royal Marine, sir!"

"Then you shouldn't have joined a mounted corps." Hector's lips closed like a vise. "C. B. and more riding for you, my lad."

But when Blythe had demonstrated his point conclusively by being bucked off for months on end, Hector at last took pity on him. A credit to the Royal corps, he did everything else beautifully and, like all Marines, knew the duties of an officer's servant backwards. That was four years ago. And Blythe had served him devotedly ever since.

Hector came in.

Blythe jumped to attention.

"Well, Blythe—" with a nod towards the carefully folded paper, purchased ten minutes before, Hector pronounced the usual formula, "is there anything interesting in the *Prophet* tonight?"

But Blythe for once did not make the usual response: 'Nothin' to speak of, sir.' Instead, with considerable agitation, sternly suppressed, he answered, as he drew off Hector's coat:

"Bit on the front page, sir, about us. P'raps you've seen it?"

"No. Where is it?"

Blythe handed over the paper. Hector's face grew dark with the severity that could make a division tremble.

Splashed across the page was the heading: 'Do New Brooms Always Sweep Clean?'

And, beneath the heading, this paragraph:

'According to the old saw, "New Brooms Always Sweep Clean." We think this saying needs revision. We are led to think so by the strange slackening of the bonds of discipline which until lately held a certain instrument of the law quartered in Broncho in constant control. Last night, our pride in the organization to which we refer received a rude shock. Details are not necessary. The outrageous conduct of the member of this force, who reeled up and down Main St., using the most blasphemous language and shooting up the town, until gathered in by the patrol nearly an hour afterwards, is too fresh in our memories to require full description. This is only one of the many incidents which, since the change in command was made, we have shudderingly anticipated. We do not blame the men. We blame the leader.'

The paragraph, as Hector, of course, knew, dealt with the 'outrageous conduct' of the Marquis, who, on the previous night, had enjoyed, for the first time since his transference to Broncho, a spree in town and who was now in the cells, awaiting punishment. Equally, of course, the 'leader' referred to was himself.

Following his first interview with the M. P. for Broncho, Hector had set going a part of the complicated machinery which was at his disposal, as a Police officer, with the object of discovering Molyneux's true identity. These investigations had proven fruitless. It is not easy to trace a man's antecedents back through utter obscurity to a point fifteen years' distant; and Welland—if it *was* Welland—had covered his tracks too well. Hector had learned that no-one—not even Jim Jackson or MacFarlane—connected the successful politician of Broncho with the unsuccessful criminal Hector had driven from the country. Why should they? Without a scrap of real evidence, Hector had realized that he could do nothing to denounce his man. Yet he was absolutely certain that Molyneux was Welland. Since their first meeting, he had observed many things, small in themselves but great in the aggregate, which his tenacious memory recognized as traits of the one-time cattle-thief and whiskey-smuggler. But, failing definite evidence which would hold in a court of law, he knew that he must treat him, not for what he had been, but for what he was. He must deal with Molyneux, at least outwardly, as Molyneux, not as Welland. The fight—if fight it was to be—must of necessity be fought with the weapons, not of the past, but of the present.

And this paragraph told him definitely that fight there was to be. It was his business to know how the *Prophet* was controlled; and he knew that it was controlled by Molyneux's party, if not by Molyneux himself, and was edited by one of Molyneux's friends. That was enough. On the surface, to those who knew not Molyneux's true identity, the paragraph represented a well-merited—or cowardly, according to their lights—attack on Superintendent Adair by a paper supporting—or, as some knew, virtually controlled by—the politician. But actually, as Hector knew, and Welland knew,

but no-one else knew or would know, it was the opening shot in the ex-criminal's campaign of revenge.

On Welland's side, this paragraph told him, the tactics were to be slander, veiled insinuation, deceit cunningly employed in constant endeavour to catch him at a disadvantage and fierce condemnation of any open error in his administration, all tending ultimately to drive Hector out of the Force. On Hector's side, because his hands were tied by his position, he could hope only to match his wits with Welland's whenever an opportunity, real or maliciously created, for an attack by the politician should occur and to frustrate Welland by doing his work so well that there could be no complaint. The stake was, on one hand, personal revenge for what had been, in Welland's eyes, a wrong; on the other, Hector's personal honour and the honour and welfare of his men; the issue, Politics versus Patriotism.

This was the conflict which Hector felt approaching as he read that paragraph in the *Prophet*.

Remembering the issue, and holding the item as at least a malicious and exaggerated attack on his own men, whom it was his duty to protect, he felt hot resentment boil through him. Then his thought went to the Marquis, who had given the paper—and Welland—this opening, the drunken waster he was to reform. Men like that brought discredit on any corps!

The Marquis was 'for it.' 'It' was 'coming to him.'

II

A few days after the Marquis had been banished to the cells for his misdeeds, Blythe sprang a second surprise on his C. O. Hector came in to change for mess.

"Beg pardon, sir, but—but a girl's waitin' to see you—been here all afternoon."

"A girl?" asked Hector. "What does she want?"

"She wouldn't say, sir."

"Well, tell her to see me at the Orderly Room in the morning."

"I told her that, sir, but she says it's privit', sir. Wants

to see you alone, sir. I told her to go, but she swore she'd wait. 'No women allowed in barracks after Retreat,' I says. 'Garn, chase yerself. *You* go an' retreat!' she says. 'I'm goin' to see Major Adair.'

"All right. Show her in."

The girl was very young and not bad-looking. She was, in fact, pretty, with big eyes, clear complexion and blue-black hair. She wore a home-made dress of more or less fashionable cut and a saucy little hat trimmed with a marvellous assortment of flowers.

Her air, on entering, was one of bravado, but a glance at Hector quite banished it and she hesitated, nervously entwining her hands, near the door. Blythe surveyed her with ill-concealed triumph. She had been very bold until confronted by the great 'Spirit-of-Iron' himself. Where was that boldness now?

"Well, young lady," said Hector kindly, "What can I do for you? Come in and sit down, won't you?"

Still she hesitated.

Finally, in a husky whisper, she answered, "Please, sir, I'd rather stand."

"All right," he replied good-humouredly. "But won't you tell me what you want?"

"It's—it's private. I wanta see you—alone."

She glanced maliciously at Blythe.

"Leave us for a moment, please, Blythe," said Hector.

"Yessir."

"Now my girl—but first—what's your name?"

She took a few steps forward. His quiet voice and friendly eyes gave her confidence.

"My name's Nellie—Nellie Lavine. I'm a waitress at the *Golden West* Café (she pronounced it 'Kaif'), an' I've come—about—about one o' your men, Major Adair."

"Yes?"

"Gennlemun by name Mr. Humphries."

The Marquis! What the devil had he been up to? Instantly Hector's mind flashed to the Marquis, in the cells.

"He's—he's—my—my beau—my fellow."

She challenged and defied him with her eyes.

"I congratulate—er—Mr. Humphries on his good taste. Are you his—girl?"

She simpered.

"Ye-yes. That's to say—well, I'm darn sure he's mine. That pink-faced little goo-goo at Young's dance-hall; an' that Smith kid—father's a rancher an' she wears cow-gal clothes an' thinks she owns the place—*they* say he's *theirs*. But he ain't. He's mine, 'cause he says so."

She finished on a note of triumph.

"Well, in that case," Hector smiled, "it must be so. Go on."

He was wondering if tragedy lay ahead.

"Mr. Humphries—he's my fellow. An'—an'—you've put him in jug, Major Adair!"

The last was an accusation meant to wither him; but, somehow, it failed.

"I'm sorry, Miss Lavine. I had to."

"Had to?"

"Yes. The regulations lay down certain penalties for drunkenness and I have to carry them out."

"But, Major—the poor boys—"

"Are fine boys. But thoroughbreds need the strong hand. Now, don't work yourself up, young lady. You can't understand."

"I think—you're—damn crool!" she whimpered, feeling herself beating against an immense stone wall. "You—might—give him a chance!"

"Did he send you here to plead for him?" Hector flashed.

"No, he didn't! *No!*"

She stamped her foot.

"All right," he said quietly. "I believe you—otherwise I wouldn't listen. You think I might give him a chance?"

"Please, sir."

Penitent she was now and supplicating in her woman's way.

"He's had lots of chances—lots of chances. Do you think he's worth all this?"

"Sure he is." She was very confident. "And, anyway—I love him."

"How long have you known him—he's only been here about three weeks, remember."

"About—that, I guess," she faltered. "But I *know* he's all right. He's a gennelmun—a real one—an' all he needs is a chance."

"You're a stout little lover," said Hector gently. "But he's a hard one to save. Is that what you're trying to do?" She hung her head.

"Yes," she whispered. Then, pleadingly, "Oh, Major,—please, Major—if you'd ever loved like I do—"

"How do you know I have not?" he asked.

"All the better, then! Oh, Gee, I'm crazy about him—just crazy—an' he is, too—about me, I mean. Why, he writes *pomes* to *me*!"

"Does he?" Hector thought of the Marquis' reputation as a lady-killer and wondered how many women could say the same thing. "May I see one?"

"Ah-ah—s-a-y—!"

"Come along," he encouraged, "as proof!"

"There!"

From the bosom of her dress she fished a sachet. Out of this she extracted a bit of paper, which she handed over to Hector, smiling prettily. Then she walked away to hide her confusion in the shadows.

Hector read, in the strong handwriting of the Marquis:

*The land was still, by parching drought possessed—
A desert waste. From out the sullen sky
The sun beat down. Her burnt and barren breast
Lay naked to his wrath. She longed to die—
Exhausted, now by months of endless pain. . . .
Till, suddenly, the far horizon's rim
Trembled with lightning and the day grew dim,
Great thunders rolled and, roaring, then—the rain!*

*And lo! Where sorrow thrived and death had been,
Gladness and life returned. The hopeless herds
Came drifting back and all the land was green,
Fragrant and fresh and loud with singing birds*

*Returning thanks. . . . O, say you understand. . . .
The rain,—it was your love; my heart the land!*

Could the Marquis, after all, be genuinely in love with this girl?

"Thank you, Miss Lavine."

He returned the paper. She took it hastily. Her eyes shone.

"Well?" she asked.

"I'm satisfied. But—won't you take my warning?"

"Say, I can look after myself. I wasn't born yesterday!" There was some pique in her voice.

"Weren't you?" he asked quaintly. Then, suddenly, he rose and stood beside her. "Listen, little girl. I'm trying to save Humphries myself."

"Eh—Oh, Major—" She looked at him delightedly. "Gee, you're a good scout! An' I thought I was scart of you!"

Hector smiled faintly.

"You want me—to be easier on him in future?"

"That's it, please, sir!"

"Then we'll do our best to pull him up—together. But it's a secret, mind you!"

"Oh, Gee—" she began again.

"A secret, remember! Good-bye!"

He held out his hand. She clasped it swiftly.

"By golly, Major—you're—" she exclaimed rapturously.

"That'll do!" he answered. "Good-bye."

"I wonder what he really is?" he asked himself, when the girl had gone. "Sound at heart or—?"

"Well, I'll spare him for a bit," he decided. "Till he really *does* kick over the traces."

But something soon altered *that* resolution.

III

The window of Hector's den commanded a view of the married officers' quarters, and of the back door of MacFarlane's house, which was nearest.

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“Whether the motive is honest or not, it shakes the faith of the people in the Force. Even if the item is accurate and the attacks are justified, it still shakes the faith of the people. It makes our work ten times more difficult. Take some of these attacks on the conduct of our men. They make for discontent in the ranks because they are false and because the men can do nothing to protect themselves. The best regiment in the world has an occasional drunk in it. But it resents fiercely an allegation classifying every man in the regiment with that drunk. Now, that’s what has been happening here lately. Not long ago, you’ll remember, one of our fellows shot up the town. Well, he did wrong. He was dealt with. And, mark my words, if I don’t break him, the men will. They always do. They’ll drive him out of the Force. Then isn’t that good enough? No; the papers must immediately raise an uproar against the man, against the Force, against me. They forget what these men do. On duty they risk death. They endure awful loneliness in places where they never see a card, a drink, a woman. If occasionally—they overstep themselves when they return—what wonder? But no consideration is given that side of the case. I’m not defending irregularities. They’re wrong. But the man to deal with them is *here*——” he tapped his breast, “not down in the offices of the *Prophet*. Do you blame me if I resent these intrusions?”

Welland, without removing his cigar, said:

“Well, *I* can’t stop it, Major! What do you want me to do?”

There was leering triumph in the assertion.

“When we first met, Mr. Molyneux, you promised me your support.”

“Yes. And I said I’d go for any inefficiency. I’ve done it.”

“Always without justification.”

“That’s your opinion.”

“And the truth. I want to be friends with you. Leave your share in the assault out of it.” Hector swallowed the humble pie—with a great effort—for the good of his cause. “I want your help—not for myself—if this thing goes on, I can fight it alone——” The politician, observing the great chest

and shoulders and the steel-coloured eyes in the rugged face, felt a sharp sense of his opponent's indomitable strength. "Your help—to stop as much of this unjust criticism as possible. That will improve efficiency, stamp out crime and leave the men—my men—alone. You don't know my point of view, Molyneux. I hold every man in my division——" he spoke very earnestly and quietly—"in the hollow of my hand. I can make their lives Heaven or Hell. Knowing this, they look to me for justice. I try to give it. They look to me for *protection*. By God, they're going to have it!"

His fist crashed on the table.

"You were saying—about me——?" said Molyneux smoothly.

"I want your help—no, not your help, but simply justice from you, that's all. I want you, for example, to muzzle the *Prophet*."

"I don't control the *Prophet*. The Editor's a friend of mine but I've got little influence with him. Don't ask impossibilities, Major."

Hector knew that Molyneux lied. But, again, he had to accept the assertion.

"I believe you could point out *this* to him. His campaign goes too far when it publishes such an item as this about Demon George, the American outlaw. It's really that item I came to see you about."

"Have you got it there? Read it."

"No, I won't read it. It's just the worst of the series on that particular subject. You know what they all amount to: 'This outlaw, who killed four men in Texas five years ago, has appeared in town. He has been recognized. Broncho is in a panic. Yet the Mounted Police don't arrest him. Why? They must have descriptions, etc., etc. They ought to have done so as soon as he entered the district. The truth probably is that they have not even discovered his presence. Asleep at the switch, as usual. Or they think it wiser to avoid his guns. This could not have happened before the change in command.' That's about the sum total of it all."

"Do you want to know what I think of that, Major Adair?"

asked the politician abruptly. "While I don't agree with all that dirty stuff about your being afraid of this outlaw and so on—I consider that item and those that accompanied it justified. In fact, I suggested it myself. Again, understand, I had nothing to do with the dirty side; but I suggested the publication. Men who knew Demon George came to me and told me he was in town. I waited to see if you were sharp enough to spot him. Days passed and you took no action, when you ought to have jugged him at once. Then I gave the facts to the *Prophet*, advising them to send a reporter up to you to see if you knew of that man's presence. The reporter was told to say nothing, I believe, but just to sound you out. He saw you personally. You knew nothing. That convinced the Editor you were asleep. So he published that attack. I think, in the main, it was deserved. Why, even now, that bird is still in town, letting on as if he owns it and everyone was afraid of him. The paper opened your eyes. But you've done nothing yet. That's what I call inefficiency."

The politician had thrown down his cards with a vengeance!

"So that's how the land lies?" said Hector. It was his turn now. "Listen to me, Mr. Molyneux. I believe you're sincere but I'm going to show you just where you went wrong, sir. Take this in a friendly spirit, please. As a prominent man here, it was your duty to advise me of this man's arrival. Had it been necessary, I could then have arrested him. As it is, you send—or your Editor friend sends—a reporter and he more or less asks me if there are any sensational arrests in prospect or any distinguished criminals in town. We don't give such information, Mr. Molyneux, unless the net is already so closely round our man that publication can do no harm. Naturally, I sent the reporter away. Immediately you jump at conclusions and the *Prophet* publishes the news of Demon George's arrival and says I'm asleep—either way, with bad effect. Demon George is told that his presence is known and so warned to make his getaway if he wants to. Or it makes him perky, encourages him to stay on here in defiance of me and perhaps, eventually,

to break the law. Supposing he gets away? Then the *Prophet* is delighted. An outlaw has escaped, but that doesn't matter, because they can say 'I told you so!' and go for me again. Supposing he stays and breaks the law? An innocent party suffers! Wouldn't it have been better for you to have advised me of this man's presence, so that his capture might be assured?"

In spite of himself, the politician shifted uneasily under the keen gaze.

"Let me tell you why Demon George is still at liberty. As it happens, I was immediately informed as soon as he set foot in the place. But I had nothing to arrest him on—no description from the States—remember, the crime is five years old—nothing but insinuations from men who might owe him a grudge. I took the best course open to me, Mr. Molyneux, under the circumstances—wired the Yankee officials, did my best to keep the thing dark—unfortunately, the *Prophet* spoilt my plan—and had the man constantly shadowed. So far I'm still waiting for news—Texas is a long way off, five years a long time. But Demon George has obligingly remained in town, out of bravado, and sooner or later will give me grounds for arresting him. Or, if he tries to leave, I'll jail him on suspicion. The *Prophet* hasn't made a fool of me—only of itself!"

The politician was utterly at a loss. He saw that his shot had missed. As soon as the American outlaw was actually in jail, Hector's apparent apathy would be explained. The citizens of Broncho, at present worked up to some hostility, would see that the Superintendent had done right and had been at all times conversant with every move of Demon George. They would swing round to their old love and the *Prophet* would be discredited.

Unable, for the moment, to meet the situation, Welland assumed the friendliest aspect and said:

"Well, Major, I congratulate you. I was wrong. Now, what do you want me to do?"

Hector took his triumph quietly.

"Keep the *Prophet* quiet till I've landed Demon George. And prevent similar blunders in future," he answered.

"I told you I don't control the *Prophet*," said Welland. "So I can't promise. But I'll do my best."

"That's all I want," replied Hector, rising. "I knew you'd help. Goodbye."

With Hector's departure, Welland sat down to think. The interview had shocked him severely. His opponent was not going to go down tamely, he saw that. Moreover, he was apparently confident that he could defend himself single-handed. Welland had honestly believed that in the matter of Demon George, Hector had been caught napping. Furthermore, Hector's appeal for silence, while humbling the Superintendent, acted as a drag on Welland for the future. After what Hector had said, he could not very well continue his attacks. He wanted Demon George to escape, so that the *Prophet's* campaign might deeply impress the people. But his escape now seemed impossible.

Presently, however, the politician took heart. Had the outlaw not been closely watched, he would have warned him, so that the escape might be brought about, but the Police would certainly trace back that warning to its source—himself. That would never do. A better course would be to urge on the *Phophet* anew. Demon George might thus be warned and the people be further incited against Hector. He had said that he could not muzzle the paper and had no direct control over it—a lie; but Hector, he argued, did not know it a lie. He could tell Hector that his efforts to silence his Editor friend had failed. And, whether the outlaw was or was not taken, further damage might still be done to Hector. The *Prophet* could wriggle out of its own trap afterwards, if necessary.

"By God, he hasn't won yet!"

Whereupon he scrawled secret instructions to the *Prophet* for a renewal of the 'Demon George campaign.'

v

The moon lay white on the barracks and 'Lights Out' had long since sounded. The Marquis, having escaped detection

with that unfathomable cunning common to drunken men, climbed in at the open window of his own barrack-room and crept over to his cot—safe!

No-one had been disturbed by his entry. But for the even breathing of his sleeping comrades, all was quiet. His brain was twirling a roseate heaven full of lights and music. He was very happy. He did not feel like going to bed. He wanted to sing. Many tunes and pictures were dancing madly in his head—strains and scenes culled from happenings of the night—from days long past, too. Now he was drinking with a ring of convivial punchers, now with a group of Sandhurst cadets. Ripping place, Sandhurst had been—jolly rags——

The thought of ‘rags’ suddenly gave him the diabolical idea: ‘Haven’t had a rag for a hick of a time. Why not now?’ But what? What? Suddenly came glorious inspiration. He was said to have once ‘shot up’ the town. Well, why not——? And Bacchus answered, ‘Why not, old chap, why not?’

First—in a colossal struggle—he removed his boots. Then he tip-toed from cot to cot. The moonlight, streaming in, enabled him to see quite plainly and his comrades slept on with miraculous tenacity. From the head of each cot he removed the occupant’s weapons—carbine and revolver—and all his ammunition. He heaped the carbines and their ammunition under his own bed. The revolvers he carefully loaded and set in rows on the bed, together with the surplus revolver ammunition. By the time he was finished—it took a long time—he had cornered every weapon in the room.

“By Jove,” he told himself joyously, “this’ll make old Spit-an’-Polish sit up!”

The Marquis’ first shot stirred the hair of the corporal in charge and lodged in the wall behind. The second rang with a bell-like note against the cot of the next man. Then he blazed off a string of shots, each in the general direction of a cot, so that he traversed the whole room. Drunk as he was, the Marquis did not shoot to kill. He aimed only to miss—closely. His aim was wonderfully accurate. Whiskey improved it. In moderation, whiskey often performs such

miracles. The Marquis was not 'blind'—merely inebriated.

The corporal in charge, uttering one wild yell, bounced out of bed and glanced, bewildered, round the room. The men sat up in turn, making a thousand blasphemous comments. Was it fire or had another revolt broken out? The Marquis sent a shot between the corporal's agitated legs and accelerated his fire. That was enough. The corporal went to ground under his cot and the men followed his example.

Followed a moment's silence, painful after the uproar of the firing. Some of the men, putting forth venturesome heads, spotted the well-known figure, squatting on his bed like a pirate on a sea-chest, a smoking revolver in each hand, a devilishly happy smile on his handsome face.

"It's the Marquis, fellows!"

"You bet it is!" the Marquis grinned, showing his white teeth, "I'm in command of this-hic- outfit! Take cover!"

Once more the storm of bullets roared. Every head vanished as if shot back by a common string.

"Haven't any of you got a gun?" the corporal asked plaintively.

"Not me, corp. Not me," ran through the room.

"No, sir. I've got 'em all, Corporal!" laughed the Marquis, emphasizing his remark with a shot that gouged the floor near the N. C. O.'s bed.

This was a pretty situation. They were at the mercy of a drunken lunatic.

The Marquis began the National Anthem, firing a shot in the direction of a cot with each note. His own bed was in a corner, where it could not be assailed, commanded every window and faced the door. His strategical position was perfect.

The room, but for the firing, was absolutely silent and without movement. Here was a case where discretion was decidedly the better part of valour.

By this time, the other barrack-rooms had been roused and the guard had turned out. Through the thunderclaps raised by the Marquis their anxious calls could be heard. A crowd appeared at a window and someone cried "I'll bet it's the Marquis!"

"You're damn-hic-jolly well right!" said the Marquis, scattering the crowd with a shot through the open window.

The guard, arriving outside the door, held a consultation. Meanwhile, to keep his grip on things, the Marquis sent shots regularly through the door. Presently the sergeant of the guard bellowed:

"Best drop it, Marquis, an' come quiet!"

"Come an' get me!" laughed the Marquis.

The sergeant of the guard discreetly withdrew to consider the situation.

The room was now full of smoke, the floor strewn with empty shells. In the midst sat the Marquis, one broad grin, blazing like a fire-ship and muttering:

"Jolly rag, eh what? Cheery soul, eh what?"

Arrived the Sergeant-Major, who was given to understand that the Marquis, surrounded by a heap of slain, was shooting up the barrack-room with a Gatling gun.

The Sergeant-Major was inordinately brave. He felt the weight of his responsibility and thought that he could cow the Marquis.

Advancing boldly to the door during a lull in the storm, he loudly shouted:

"Humphries, you're under arrest. It's the Sergeant-Major!"

Came the Marquis' pleasant drawl:

"I like you, Sergeant-Major, so please k'way't'oor!"

"What's that?"

"I said I—*like* you. So keep away-hic-from that door!"

The Sergeant-Major clutched the door-knob.

A volley rattled through the shattered panels.

"I *told* you, Sergeant-Major, *keep away!*" said the Marquis coolly.

Some of the officers now arrived, including the Adjutant, Forshaw. The Marquis became more uproarious than ever.

Forshaw was well able to deal with any emergency. He made enquiries and calculations.

"Well, get the fire-engine," he ordered at last. "We'll knock him out with the hose."

But when the engine was in position and everything ready,

Forshaw, perceiving that the fire had decidedly slackened in the last two or three minutes, peeped into the room from under cover.

"Why, he's asleep!" he whispered, suppressing a laugh.

It was quite true. Peering over the Adjutant's shoulder, the attackers beheld the Marquis, exhausted, his 'rippin' rag' over, slumbering like a child in a litter of empty shells.

Very quietly they took the hero into custody. He did not once open his eyes.

VI

"Sergeant-Major, before we proceed further, I'll see the accused alone."

The Marquis, bareheaded and strictly at attention, between the armed escort, was 'on the carpet' before the C. O. for the offenses he had committed in the barrack-room.

Hector's announcement came to him as a surprise—whether agreeable or otherwise it was still too early to determine. Sergeant-Major Bland was also surprised. But he maintained the utterly impassive expression proper to Sergeant-Majors on such occasions, said "Yes, sir," saluted and marched the escort out.

"Shall I go, too, sir?" asked the Adjutant.

"Yes, please."

The Marquis was now alone before his omnipotent judge. The keen eyes searched his face. Anticipating an unprecedented bursting of the vials of wrath, the Marquis braced his cringing soul to endure the storm.

But the storm came not . . . only, after a time, Hector's voice, more sorrowful than angry:

"Humphries, why did you do it?"

The Marquis could not believe his ears.

"Pardon, sir?"

"I say—why did you do it?"

A flicker of a smile flashed across the Marquis' mobile face, at the memory of his 'rippin' rag' but was quickly suppressed.

"I don't know, sir," he faltered, suddenly abashed. The

C. O. had a marvellous knack of making people feel small. "Of course, I was drunk, sir."

"Yes but—why were you drunk?"

This was persistency.

"I—I don't know, sir."

The Marquis wished the C. O. would shift his tactics. This quiet enquiry was terrible.

"It's time you dropped it, Humphries. It does you no good. And it's not playing the game with your people."

A sudden pallor came upon the Marquis. He looked like a man trapped.

"My—people, sir?"

"Yes, your people. Everyone knows you're a gentleman born, Humphries—of good family."

The Marquis breathed again.

"Is it fair to them?"

The Marquis, at a loss, bit his lip, hung his head——

"I can't see where they come into this thing, anyway, sir," he said at last. "I'm—I'm on my own."

"They do come into it, though, boy. But leave them aside for a moment—you're a gentleman. You should know better. You disgrace the stock you've sprung from, Humphries, when you go on like this. If only for that reason, I want to help you to—to pull up, before it's too late."

Again the Marquis could not believe his ears. Was this the man who had 'told him off' so thoroughly not long ago?—The terrible 'Spirit-of-Iron,' whose reputation as a handler of delinquents was enough to frighten the hardest sinner into repentance?

"You're wasting time with me, sir," said the Marquis, suddenly bold. In his voice was defiance but defiance strongly blended with despair. "I don't want to be reformed. Anyway,—I'm not worth it."

"Yes, you are"—still the even, passionless tone—"Because you've good blood in you, Humphries, and also, of course, because you're a notorious scapegrace, I mean to help you out. I decided to help you as soon as I'd sized you up. Then—certain things occurred which inclined me towards severity. You'd have got it, too, by Heaven—don't mistake

me—but something again intervened for you. I said just now your people came into this thing. They *do* come into it, Humphries!”

The Marquis threw up his head, meeting Hector’s eyes with incredulity and frank disbelief. But the C. O. did not seem to see it. Truth was in his face.

“My—people, sir?” the Marquis faltered and again the colour left his face. “I—I don’t—I don’t think—I understand.”

“Listen to this, then, and realize how mistaken you have been and what your conduct really means. This letter was sent me some days ago by the Commissioner, to whom it was addressed. It saved you when I was going to put you down. It mightn’t have been necessary to read it at all, had you behaved yourself. But now, I’m afraid it’s almost the only thing to have effect.”

Then he read the letter, while the Marquis, restless and set-faced, listened, still biting his lip. It was dated from London.

“‘Dear Sir :

It is only after much hesitation and with much reluctance that I approach you to solicit your aid in a purely personal matter. Under the circumstances, however, I feel sure you will forgive the intrusion. I find it difficult to find words adequately to express all that is in my heart. I will therefore confine myself to a brief summary of the facts.

My second son, the Hon. Charles Percival Humphries Hardisty, whose portrait I enclose’ ”—the Marquis winced as Hector read the name and pushed forward the photograph—“ ‘is, I believe, at present serving in your Corps as a constable or trooper. He was, perhaps, our favourite son. He was to have had a Commission in the 1st. Life Guards but, for certain misdemeanors, was forced to leave Sandhurst. We had, I regret to say, hard words on the subject—I am afraid I went too far but the matter involved certain points of honour on which I felt very strongly. And he was high-spirited and headstrong, as I should have remembered. However, to avoid wearying you with painful particulars in which you can have no great interest, I cut off

his allowance, or rather reduced it to a minimum, and ordered him to leave the country for the Colonies. He chose Canada. Until some years ago, I made him a monthly remittance and endeavored to set him up as a rancher. He ran so into debt, however, that I eventually told him—again, to my present regret—I would do no more. Reports had come to me that he was leading a wild, worthless life in a small town in the Territories near the ranch whereon he was employed. He then wrote to me, saying I would never hear of him again. Since then, my enquiries have intimated that he had joined the North-West Mounted Police. As he was a fine horseman and fond of soldiering, this is probably so. I have frequently written him, sending the letters by general delivery as I know he would not wish his identity to become known to his comrades but have had no answer. This does not necessarily mean that he has not received them but he is so sensitively proud that he may have decided to ignore them. He is probably using an assumed name but the photograph I enclose will enable you to trace him.

My object in writing you, sir, is to beg you, firstly, to be so good as to ascertain whether my son is actually serving in your Corps; secondly, to entreat you not to be severe on the boy if, as I fear, he has misconducted himself while under your command; thirdly, to enlist your assistance to save him from the ruinous path he has taken; and, finally, to use your influence towards inducing him to reply to my letters, at least advising us of his health and whereabouts. I authorize you to inform him that I have repented of my somewhat hasty judgment and will make amends as far as possible and also to tell him that unless a reconciliation is effected now, I fear it never will be, for the anxiety is slowly killing his mother.

In closing, I again apologize for thus troubling you but feel you but understand. And may God bless your efforts.

Thanking you,

Believe me, sir,

Yours truly and indebtedly,

Hannington.' ”

A long silence was broken at last by Hector :

"That is the letter . . . The photo, Humphries, is of yourself . . . the writer is a peer of very old family, Baron Hannington . . . your father. . . ."

The Marquis neither moved nor spoke.

"Your *father*. Can't you read between the lines, Humphries? All that pride of race and name . . . it was hard for him to write that letter. . . . He's an old man—I looked him up in the Peerage. And he—his heart's broken, Humphries."

The Marquis made an inarticulate little sound but said nothing and remained standing at attention.

"Tell me, Humphries. I want to help you. Was it—a girl?"

The Marquis answered at last, in a jerky voice :

"No, sir. The Sandhurst affair, you mean? It was—oh, a lot of things."

"Was a girl concerned in any way—were you engaged or anything—when you left England?"

"In a way."

The Marquis' lip was trembling.

"You lost her, because of the scandal. Is that it?"

With sure, deft hand the C. O. was dissecting his very soul.

"Yes, sir."

"And that's why—you go on the tear?"

"Partly," the Marquis muttered.

"And why you try to forget—with other women?"

The Marquis nodded, head sinking.

"It's foolish."

"My God, sir," the Marquis burst out suddenly, "you don't understand—you don't know the shame—or what I've lost—or the hopelessness of what's ahead—or——"

His was a cry of agony.

"Steady, boy," replied Hector. "I understand—perfectly. I know—what this has meant to you."

Again came momentary silence.

"Now—about that letter. What do you propose to do?"

"I—I don't know."

"Then I'll tell you. You'll write your father, of course, and make that reconciliation. Why, you're lucky to have a father and mother—and have them care as much. Then you'll stop this nonsense. You'll work hard, get your Commission"—the Marquis flashed an astonished glance at Hector, but it was disregarded,—“go to the top of the tree, make a name for yourself and be able at last to look your people—even that girl of yours—in the face.”

“I can't. I can't—it's too late!”

“It's *not* too late. Why, I was once almost as handicapped as you, Humphries. My father died when I was a youngster, my mother's been dead six years. I started as a buck constable. But the officers were good to me—the first Commissioner—and later Commissioners—and Superintendent Denton, who left the Force some time ago. They all helped. Officers *don't* go down on a man unjustly, Humphries. They're all ready to lend a hand. You think I look on you as only one man in hundreds, too insignificant to care about. But I don't. You're as much to me as any. You're not the first I've helped make good, by any means. And I want to help you. *You* can make good, if I could. Yes, you can. Now, listen. I'm not going to hammer you this time, though you've deserved it. I'm going to let you off easily. In return, I want you to run straight. And the first time I get the chance, I'll give you an opportunity—a real opportunity—to prove yourself.”

But the strain of the interview had been almost more than the Marquis could bear. His father's letter had put him on the rack. And the C. O.'s unexpected kindness had humbled him into the dust. Instead of unreasoning severity he had today, for the first time, sympathy. He began to understand why men loved and feared Hector, to see why he had attained greatness.

“Is it a go?”

“My God, sir—I—don't know—what—to say. You're the first——”

“That'll do,” Hector interrupted him. Then it *is* a go. Remember—!”

And he called in the Sergeant-Major and escort.

VII

"Well, what is it?" said Hector.

Dandy Jack, the sixteen-year-old, angelical puncher, took off his broad-brimmed slouch hat and smoothed down his elegant clothes—wide, flapping leather chaps faced with silver, grey flannel shirt, spotless mauve silk neckerchief and trimmings.

"Demon George, Major."

"Yes." Hector was instantly alert. "What about him?"

"I know for a fact he stuck up a puncher last night. The puncher's too scart to report it."

"You do? Positive evidence?"

"You bet."

"All right. Go and tell the Sergeant-Major. Then send him over to me."

Dandy Jack departed.

Hector felt triumphant. The *Prophet's* clamour, despite Welland's promise, had been very loud of late. Not that Hector had ever expected Welland to try seriously to stop the uproar. His enemy was too deadly an enemy to do that. Many citizens were muttering among themselves, asking why Adair still held his hand? Their criticisms had been hard to bear. But Hector had borne them stoically. The stout confidence of his men and of many other citizens had, of course, helped to make things easier.

He tried not to smile as he thought of what Welland would say when he heard the news: 'Demon George, the outlaw with a price on his head, dead or alive, taken at leisure by the Mounted Police.'

Sergeant-Major Bland came in. Hector gave him his instructions.

"He frequents the *Maverick* saloon. We'll tell off one man to make the arrest tonight. Warn him to do it quietly—nothing provocative—no gun-play if avoidable—the usual thing——"

"He's a dangerous man, sir. Perhaps two men——"

"No! You know the tradition? Well, look to it. But

have a patrol at hand, in case of trouble. A corporal and two men."

"Very good, sir. Have you any suggestions?"

"Corporal Savage, perhaps."

"Yes, sir. And for the arrest? It wants a good, steady——"

"Yes. Humphries."

"Humphries, sir?"

Bland was again surprised.

"Yes, Humphries. And tell Corporal Savage to remind him of our compact; also, that the arrest will be a real service—to me, personally. Humphries will understand."

VIII

The night turned out dark, with scurrying clouds, a rising wind and, now and then, a spatter of rain. The Marquis passed out of the barrack-gate with a cheery word to the sentry and trudged off to town.

He had received his orders that afternoon. He knew exactly what was expected of him. He knew—could he ever forget?—exactly what was meant by 'our compact.' He also knew what the C. O. meant by 'a real service—to me personally.' He had not witnessed the *Prophet's* attacks for nothing. And he was buoyed up with hope and gratitude and determined to show the C. O. that he had not been merciful in vain.

He got into town and walked steadily through the almost deserted streets. The wooden houses loomed up, damnably cheerless, murky lights glowing dimly from their windows. Some of them, with their pitiful imitation second-storey fronts, reminded him of would-be gentlemen wearing 'dickies.' Now and then doors opened and he heard the tinkle of out-of-tune pianos, the coarse jesting of men. The wretched cow-ponies, tails to wind, reins trailing, waited miserably for their masters. Suddenly the utter squalor, the primitive uncouthness of Broncho, which its citizens considered equal to any old-world capital, came violently home to him and his spirits bumped down to zero.

A drunken remittance man came reeling from a saloon, singing a maudlin strain with 'Piccadilly' for its theme. A stupendous longing touched him, for London, dear old London, and all it meant; his people, his——; and for a moment he saw himself as he had once been—a carefree man about town—in contrast with what he was—an exile, an exiled gentleman-ranker, one of the Lost Legion.

No, by Jove,—not lost! The C. O.'s interest in him was like a light in the universal darkness. He was going to prove himself, make himself, tonight!

Passing the *Golden West* Café, he felt an impulse to go in and talk to Nellie. She was a good-hearted little thing. But he put the thought aside. He regretted, now, that he had played the fool with women—making a game of a serious matter—So he walked on.

Through the night came suddenly a long, swinging, heavy, *tramp, tramp, tramp* of feet, a musical jingle of spurs—the tramp and jingle of Corporal Savage's patrol.

"That you, Humphries?"

"Yes, Corporal."

The little, bull-necked, rugged-faced N. C. O. halted in the light from a window.

"He's in the *Maverick*, all right. Take him easy. We'll be standin' by. Don't draw first. An' remember the C. O. expects you to make good."

"Yes, Corporal."

"Right. I'll wait at the corner."

The darkness and rain gulped them up. The Marquis was alone again.

The *Maverick* was but a step away. The Marquis crossed over. The sound of many voices and the ring of glasses swelled into the street.

The Marquis, whistling softly, removed his pea-jacket for greater freedom of movement and hung it over a hitching post. This done, he loosed his revolver. Then he opened the door and entered.

Instantly the hum of voices died. Every eye turned towards the tall young constable in the doorway. Every man knew what his entrance meant.

Demon George, a lanky, powerful, lantern-jawed ruffian in a pair of long boots and an old suit, was leaning against the bar, joking with the bartender, his hat on the back of his head. He was apparently unarmed. Attracted by the general silence, he turned and saw the Marquis. Instantly, his face contracted and the laugh died on his lips. He, too, guessed what the constable had come for.

The Marquis, smiling easily, disregarded the staring crowd and strolled towards him.

"I hear you're looking for a Mounted Policeman," he said smoothly. "Here I am. And I want you."

Perhaps there was an excuse for Demon George. The Law, as he knew it in his own country, shot first and talked afterwards; and there was a price on his head, which only his own hand had kept on his shoulders. That hand now flashed to his hip-pocket.

The Marquis was steeped in the Police tradition; and remembered his C. O.'s wishes.

"Leave him to me, boys!" he sang out gaily, and closed.

They struggled fiercely, the outlaw cursing. The Marquis held his opponent's right wrist, pointing the revolver upwards. With his own right hand, he whipped in a terrific blow. The outlaw was against the wall and his head could not 'give' before the blow, which broke his jaw.

Demon George fired three shots, each shot smashing the silence but going into the ceiling. The Marquis laughed.

Then, somehow—no one knew how—the outlaw got his wrist free. Another shot rang out. The Marquis sagged suddenly, dropping his arms. And, as he staggered back—back—back against the bar, the outlaw fired two more shots, emptying his revolver into the policeman's body. . . .

In the utter and awful silence which followed, Demon George, still against the wall, nursing his jaw with one hand, stared at his victim, waiting for him to drop. Not a soul dared stir. The Marquis, under the concentrating gaze, slowly twisted round, clinging to the bar for support. His face was wreathed in agony—agony not only physical but mental—of hope shattered—and he did not want the crowd to see it.

And then, like a flash, gathering his waning strength in one heroic and desperate effort, he whirled round. He could use a weapon now! The six shots of the Marquis' revolver chopped the hush—six wild, fierce claps of sound.

"You—damn—dog!" whispered the Marquis, as he fired.

Demon George had not expected the fire, since he had mortally wounded his man. He pitched onto his face, stone dead; and the Marquis slid, grinning, to the floor.

It had all happened in the space of a minute.

From outside came the rush of Corporal Savage's patrol.

The Corporal burst in, flinging the crowd aside. His eyes fell on the Marquis.

"Christ!" he said.

In a moment he had the Marquis in his arms.

The awe-struck crowd stood motionless.

"Humphries! Humphries, man!" cried the Corporal.

The Marquis opened his tired eyes, heavily, smiling.

"Got me—some way. Sorry—Corp'l!" he whispered, his voice trailing away.

"Marquis!" said Corporal Savage. The little man had a tiger's heart but his face was twitching.

The grey-green pallor of death was on the Marquis' face.

"It was dead—*or* alive—dead—*or*—Corp! Tell the Chief—tell him—I—I——"

The Corporal understood.

"I'll tell him, old scout!"

The Marquis smiled again; and then again came silence and the rough crowd took off their hats. . . .

Constable Humphries—the Hon. Charles Percival Humphries Hardisty—heart-smasher, poet, waster, gallant gentleman—had kept his compact.

Chapter III

I

"Look here, Adair," said the Commissioner, "*what* lies between you and that fellow Molyneux? Ever since your arrival in the Broncho district, a campaign has been going on against you in the papers and under the surface. The preliminary business over Demon George was a case in point. Then, afterwards, Molyneux slated you unmercifully over the death of that man Humphries. In his papers, I mean. Just now, in Ottawa, he concentrates on you again and every Eastern paper is printing his speeches. I've got a copy of Hansard here with that last outburst of his—the duel between himself and the Prime Minister. During the debate on the estimates, Molyneux grabbed the opportunity to attack the Force—apparently his favourite game. Of course, we were stoutly defended and I don't think the House took Molyneux seriously. But the papers print what he says and, because he's a Westerner, well—the people, in the East at any rate, take it for Gospel. Have you seen the reports?"

"Yes, sir," said Hector. "I've a cousin editing a Toronto paper."

"Then you know what they've been saying. Pretty severe—and talkative, eh?"

"Yes, sir. But you were going to read Hansard."

"Oh, yes. Let's see—'the Honourable member'—ah, here we are: 'And here's another case of inefficiency.'—This is Molyneux speaking—'Not long ago, early in the summer, out there, we had a notorious bad man, who came into my constituency from the United States. The man was encouraged into defiance by being permitted to walk round town a free man, terrorizing the citizens. When finally the Police officer in command took action after repeated protests, he ordered a single constable to carry out the arrest.

This young fellow—a brave lad, of good English family—attempted to arrest the man without drawing a weapon, in accordance with instructions expressly given and was, of course, shot dead. None but a fool would have ordered such a thing. That bad man should have been arrested as soon as he crossed the boundary. The arrest should have been made by several men and there should have been no monkey business of not drawing weapons. That young man was just deliberately sacrificed!”

“Now here’s a smart one from the Prime Minister, Adair—right off the bat: ‘I beg to differ. That young man was a hero. He died doing his duty in accordance with one of the noblest traditions of the North-West Mounted Police—using no unnecessary force and no provocative measures.’ Then comes Molyneux again: ‘Yes, that’s consolation to the bereaved parents! You can’t arrest Western outlaws, sir, as you would naughty boys. And please remember, I speak for my constituents. They were up in arms about that case—and are now.’ By the way, of course you wrote——”

“Yes, sir,” Hector smiled at his chief’s look of concern, “I wrote to his father. The old gentleman answered that it was the finest piece of news concerning his son he’d ever had and that he was prouder of him dead than ever, since—these were his words—his son had done his duty like a man and a Hardisty.”

“Jove! Fine, fine! Too bad the Prime Minister hadn’t those words to fling into Molyneux’s teeth. What do you think of the other statement—here: ‘I speak for my constituents. They were up in arms about that case—and are now’?”

“To a certain extent that’s true, sir. Molyneux has the support of many people; but I think the majority still trust me. I’m certain they would not agree with Molyneux’s remarks.”

“I believe you’re right,” responded the Commissioner. “But his power is growing. It’s a bad thing to have such publicity given these matters as is given by the Eastern press. Then, out here, there’s more underhand work than

ever. I've had people trying to get you pushed out of the district—Molyneux's friends, I suppose. You know that?"

"I've suspected it."

"Mind you, he's not attempting to climb to power over *us*, Adair. We're only a side issue. He's getting ahead by graft, slickness, brains. Like an octopus, he has a lot of tentacles and they're all fastening on something. Mark me, that fellow will be a big man in the West before long—and a dangerous enemy."

"Yes, sir," said Hector.

He knew that the Commissioner was working up to something.

"In view—er—of all this, and Molyneux's attitude towards you especially, Adair, I was wondering if—for your own good, y'know—you'd care to be transferred——"

His purpose stood revealed at last. To save Hector from Molyneux, he was offering to transfer him to another district.

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate the thought very much. But—well, I doubt if it would do much good, after all, sir; and it would look rather like a victory to our friend—and as if I'd turned my back to the enemy. So, I'd rather stay here, for the present, anyway."

The Commissioner obviously liked Hector's fighting spirit but seemed a little regretful.

"Is that your final decision?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, thank you."

"All right." The Commissioner threw away his cigar and prepared to go. "You may regret it, Adair. However—oh, wait a minute! You've not told me what lies between you and Molyneux. Can't you confide in me?"

Hector had once inclined towards revealing the truth to the Commissioner—to tell him that the hostile M. P. for Broncho was Welland, his purpose inspired by the incidents of fifteen years and more ago. But what was the use? He had scoured the Continent for proofs and could find none. Without proofs, to lay such charges against Molyneux would be idle.

"There's nothing to confide, sir. The man's taken a dis-

like to me for some reason unknown. Perhaps he's the tool of someone else. Who knows?"

"You've nothing against him?"

"I never met Molyneux till I came to this district, sir."

The Commissioner pondered.

"Queer! But there are strange men in this world. And if you ever change your mind about the transfer——"

"Thank you, sir. I don't think I will. Don't worry about me, sir. I've lots of stout-hearted friends. I'm not afraid."

"Don't forget you can count on me, too. Though, in a case like this, Adair, my hands are tied, very tied——"

"I know, sir. But, so long as I satisfy you, sir, I don't care a tinker's curse——"

"Good man, good man! It will be a hard fight, though! He's raised quite a storm, Adair—a growing storm—growing!"

They went back to the mess together.

II

The Commissioner's promise of support increased Hector's confidence in his ability to deal with his enemy. He had always known, of course, that this support was to be relied on. When it was a matter of defending one of his officers against an unjust assault, the Commissioner's course was plain. Still, it was pleasant to hear, from his chief's own lips, that the powerful weight of headquarters was behind him.

But the real danger lay in Welland's influence with others. He could so stir up the public against Hector, who was unable to make a move to defend himself, that he might at last be forced to resign. Or Welland might, with the assistance of his political colleagues, compel the Government to remove the Superintendent at Broncho. No justification would be offered—he would simply be told that his services were no longer required. Such things had often happened, the victim being invariably damned in the eyes of the public, who knew nothing of the facts. A third possibility—and most dangerous—was that Hector, through no fault of his

own, might fail the public in some big crisis and be removed, at Welland's instigation, as inefficient.

But against this, as he had told the Commissioner, he could gather hosts of friends, old stagers who knew him actually for what he was, not to be shaken by every changing wind, strong men, true as steel. Hector, on account of his position, could not, and in any case, would not, ask their aid; but they had watched the summer's developments, and come forward voluntarily to lend their aid.

Welland's attitude regarding the affair of Demon George and the Marquis had been particularly effective in bringing Hector recruits. The Eastern papers might have thought less of the politician's claim to represent Western public opinion had they witnessed the enlistment of, say, Jim Jackson, now among the biggest ranchers of the Territories.

Jim Jackson came in specially from his ranch, a long journey by the C. P. R., to tell Hector just what he thought of Molyneux.

"Represents the people, does he? I wonder! Which d'you thinks likely to have the backing of the West, eh? This fly-by-night Mr. Nobody from God-knows-where, or Superintendent Adair, who came into the country with the early birds and has grown up with it to what he is today?"

"He's very strong, Jim," said Hector, smiling a little.

"Never mind, Hec'. The ranchers will back their Manitou-pewabic to the last ditch."

"Thanks, old man," said Hector.

At the other end of the scale was Tom Williams, Editor of the *Broncho Branding-Iron*. Tom was eminently respectable, but, for business purposes, assumed the air of a hardened sinner, in order to be in keeping with his paper, which he had founded when 'up against it' several years before. The *Branding-Iron* was a weekly and relied for sales on an unfathomable fund of scandalous stories, directed against the great and would-be great, plus a marvellous array of rejuvenated bar-room jokes of very doubtful character. The public taste being captured, Tom's paper was regularly sold in every corner of Canada. Its influence was greatly strengthened because it never assailed any man without just

cause but went out of its way to 'brand' every crook and grafter in the Dominion. The support of such a champion was not to be sneezed at. It was a drunken roysterer but could use its rapier; and its thrust went home.

So Hector had powerful allies at both ends of the ladder.

Then there were the men—behind him to a man. Let Corporal Savage's room stand for an example. One afternoon, in the worthy Corporal's absence, a group of them got together over the *Branding-Iron* containing Tom's latest tirade.

There were present in this gathering of mighties the red-headed and hideous York, constable under Cranbrook in the days when they had arrested the gambler Perkins, and likely to remain so till promoted to non-commissioned angel; Mason, Hector's trumpeter ten years before, also a constable today; Dunsmuir, son of a Canadian millionaire, driven to enlist by boredom; and Constable Kellett, once a Colonel in the British Army, with a dazzling breast of ribbons, driven to enlist by necessity.

They were perhaps a little prejudiced in Hector's favour but were none the less representative on that account.

Dunsmuir, with a drawl suggestive of Toronto University, read extracts aloud:

" 'This so-called representative of Broncho and district . . . a beard that reeks crime and a nose that suggests whiskey. . . . We have heard a story about him from a dear old bar-keep friend of ours which takes a lot of beating. . . . I blush to print it, but Justice . . . Now this is the man who is heaving bricks at the Big Chief Manitou-pewabic . . . the kind who kicks a man when he is down and hits him when his hands are tied . . . everybody knows to whom belongs our contemporary with the John the Baptist title, which purports to be an unprejudiced . . . everybody knows that the Superintendent cannot speak . . . and, in the Humphries affair, all hands in the Police are aware that Humphries followed the best traditions of the Riders of the Plains . . . Who is likely to be trusted by the people, the man who has been a national and well-loved figure for twenty years or . . . If it came to a showdown,

who will stand by the big fellow? Why the ranchers, the Indians, the punchers, the citizens, the . . . and behind the other chap? Why, the hoboos, the bums, the politicians . . . We are certain a libel action will be started by our distinguished enemy for this; but one can wear off the effects of liquor in jail as well as elsewhere and we would feel quite at home, anyway . . .’”

“I think that calls for ringing cheers,” remarked Kellett, as Dunsmuir laid down the paper.

“Huh, listen to him stick up for ‘Spirit-of-Iron’!” sneered York.

The ex-Colonel flushed, squaring his broad shoulders. He had good reason to support the man who had taken him in, though over age, after his ranch had crashed, leaving him destitute.

“York, my lad!” he said gently, “I shall be forced to mould your unpleasant face with my boot if you use that tone again.”

“That’s right, Uncle!” Mason cut in. “Give him hell! It’s coming to him.”

“What’ll we do to him?” demanded Dunsmuir, preparing to attack York.

“Oh, shur’rup,” said York. “That fellow Williams can hand it out, can’t he, eh?”

“Sure can. I guess he’ll get brought up for libel, all right,” said Mason.

“Not him. He’s too poor to make it worth while,” Dunsmuir asserted.

“Don’t chuck your confounded money in our poverty-stricken faces,” Kellett adjured. “I like the description of Molyneux. It’s dead right.”

“Well, no one ever sues for libel unless there’s money in it,” persisted Dunsmuir. “Yes, he sure has. That bit about kicking a man when he’s down and his hands tied is just it. And every time he kicks the Chief he kicks us, too.”

“Let him kick,” Kellett said. “The Chief’s too big to care.”

“Ho, is he?” questioned York. “Think he’s not got feelin’s, like the rest o’ us?”

"Have *you* feelings, insect?"

"Damn right. Keep off 'em. 'Course we can't do nothin', so he goes on. But, by Gor, a touch o' tar an' feathers from the boys. . . ."

"Stow it," said Kellett. "You're the sort that would give him a real handle to work on. Let him talk."

"I guess the Marquis was a better man than you are, York," said Dunsmuir.

"You do, eh? Well, I guess so. Still, I've done my job when it's been given me."

"That's right," said Mason. "We've not forgotten the road-agent at Golden, old man. But you've got to stick by 'Spirit-of-Iron' in this thing; and he'd be the first to jump on any monkey business like tar and feathers."

"Right, youngster," Kellett agreed. "The chief helped make this outfit and his ideas go. Best way we can help is by doing our little job o' work and following in father's footsteps. Eh?"

"You bet." The answer was unanimous. "Nose to croup, this outfit's behind Papa!"—a sentiment but mildly expressing all the men felt in the matter.

There was one other whose views, though stronger than most, rather coincided with the men's. That was Mrs. MacFarlane. In common with every woman in Broncho, she was ready to defend the rip-snorting Superintendent with teeth and claws. Mrs. MacFarlane was prepared to go further than any.

Her admiration for Hector had steadily increased and by this time—in the fall—she did not in the least care who knew it. In fact, she rather enjoyed showing it, especially to MacFarlane, who had gradually arrived at a pitch of fierce but smouldering jealousy. He reminded her of a slumbering furnace and she loved to prod the terrific heat to life. In his outbursts, he was amusing. The possibility that the outbursts might badly scorch the prodder did not seem to occur to her. So she went gaily on.

Meanwhile, she began to think that she had melted the heart of ice, which no woman was ever known to have

affected before. She had a physical allurements few men could resist; she knew it very well. She believed that it had made itself felt on the mighty demigod whom admirers called 'Spirit-of-Iron.' Once she had told him, 'Pretty women and handsome men are *made* for one another.' She was a pretty woman; he a very handsome man. She thought the fact had sunk in by this time—that she could read it in his voice and eyes. Soon, now, she would find out if she were right.

And MacFarlane?—Where did he come in?

But he was a poor, uninteresting creature, anyway. Too bad she'd married him! *He* couldn't bring the blood to a woman's cheeks, her heart to her mouth. Whereas . . .

Mrs. MacFarlane had sympathy for Guinevere.

III

The first blizzard of the winter descended upon Broncho. At midnight, in the haven of his own den, while the rest of the barracks slept, and the Superintendent sat writing a report, the patient Blythe, in the next room, waited to put his chief to bed.

Trailing a desperate bandit from page to written page, Hector did not hear the gentle knock at the front door.

But it roused him at last. He crossed the room into the passage and opened the door—

Opened it on a woman muffled in furs, covered with snow, whose wild eyes stared over her stole and were shadowed by gleaming hair.

"Mrs. MacFarlane!"

Trained as he was to stern self-control, he could not quite hide his surprise.

"Let me come in! Let me come in!" she gasped.

Seeing that something was wrong, he suppressed a desire to ask questions, stood aside and shut the door.

She swayed in the passage.

"Can you walk?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—I—think so."

And she tottered forward.

"I—I—you'll just have to help me——"

"I thought so!" he said quickly.

Half shyly, after the manner of men unaccustomed to intimacy with women, he put an arm round her. She clung to him, marvellously appealing in her helplessness.

Intent on her welfare, he brought her to an arm-chair and pulled it up to the big stove, she murmuring little gasps of thanks.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I went—to the dance at the—Quadrille Club—with a—party from town. I told them—I could get across—the parade-ground—alone. But all the lights are out—and you can't see a thing—for the snow. I—got lost. I must—have—wandered round for hours. I'm all tired out—and nearly—frozen! If it hadn't been for your light, I—don't just know——"

Nervously overwrought, she was beginning to cry.

"All right—all right!" he said hastily. "Soon put you right. Let's see your face."

She obeyed, anxiously. What a pretty, appealing little face it was! She wondered how she looked in the role of heroine in 'Out of The Storm.'

"No frost-bite," he remarked to himself. "You must take your hat and coat off, though, till you get over this. Your gloves, too. Absurd little gloves for this country! Must get gauntlets! Mac should have told you."

The intimate 'Mac,' establishing a bond between them, she liked and the implied censure of her absent husband she fancied even more.

"Should he?" she asked, smiling woefully. "Mac doesn't take the care of me he ought."

He felt her hands. Did he—she wondered—feel the thrill which then went through her?

He did not answer the smile.

"They aren't cold," he said thoughtfully.

"They *were*," she answered.

"Well, it's safe to warm you up, which is a good thing. You won't lose any fingers this time. Come, off with that hat and coat. I've some brandy somewhere."

She stood up and removed her wraps. He assisted her with a grave, courtly grace such as MacFarlane could never show, for the reason that it was not in him.

"Fire now," he exclaimed.

Stoking and poking up the glow, he soon produced a first-class blaze.

"O-o-h!" she sighed rapturously, holding her little white hands to the warmth. She shot him a grateful and admiring glance—each glance meant to kill. "O-o-h, that's lovely."

"I'll get the brandy," he said.

She watched his tall, soldierly figure in its smart mess dress as he delved into a little cupboard. While he searched, she surveyed the room with eager interest. It was terribly bare, to her view, rigidly severe, eloquent of the hard, cold, lonely life the man led. She knew what it lacked—the feminine touch!—to make it a home! *She* would have filled it with gew-gaws and knick-knacks tied with scented pink ribbon.

One thing she noted, with peculiar satisfaction—there was not one photo of a young or fairly young woman to be seen.

He had found the brandy. Turning, he looked at her a moment. She read admiration in his eyes and suddenly felt that she must look adorably attractive—smiling wistfully in return, so small in the big chair, hair aglow, eyes very soft, white arms drooping, lustrous pink ball-dress spread out like the train of a Queen all round her.

She was the reincarnation of the original Eve, with the voice of the serpent in her ears—the serpent *had* a voice in Paradise.

So for a moment, neither moved nor spoke. Then he broke the little spell.

"Good stuff, this." He moved to the table and poured out a full-sized whack. "Drink it up."

She obeyed, loving it. He watched her calmly. Gasping a little, and blinking, she presently paused.

"This is really *very* good," she said—then, for the first time, became more personal. "I don't know what I'd have done without you. But I'm awfully afraid I disturbed you."

"Not at all," he said politely. "I'll finish when you've gone. But don't go till you've quite recovered."

"You're dying to get rid of me!" she pouted.

"Oh, no," he said. "I'm not often honoured so charmingly."

She smiled, with a little bow, and sipped the brandy again.

"I wonder," she said suddenly, "what—people would think if they knew we were alone, here—at this time of night—and——"

She laughed excitedly and looked at him with bright eyes.

"And Mac away?" he finished for her. "Well, of course, if they didn't know the circumstances, they *might* talk."

"Yes," she agreed. "But no-one need—er—will know. And I wouldn't care if they did," she concluded, with a taking little air of bravado. "Do you think I'm very shocking?"

"Not *very*," he answered.

She laughed again.

"Do you know—this is the first time I've been in a bachelor's quarters?" she jerked to a new tack, setting down the glass. "I've often been tempted——"

"You've not missed much."

"Er—no." Her look was distinctly disapproving. It's so bare—so terribly priestly. It lacks something. Oh, I know what it is!"

She had been planning this ever since the idea first struck her.

"And that is?" he asked—falling—or walking—into the trap.

"Surely you know? A woman's hand, Major, eh? Little touch here, little touch there, eh?"

"Perhaps," he answered.

She disregarded his seeming indifference.

"I'd love to straighten it out for you some time—fix it up. Ah—would you let me?"

"I think—Blythe would object."

"Oh, yes—your servant. Nasty thing." Off again, in another direction. "You know, Major, I can't understand why you've never married."

Though he did not move a muscle, she felt instinctively

that he shrank into his shell. She did not notice that one hand, resting on the table, was trembling.

"Never met a woman who would have me," he answered evasively.

"Oh, that's nonsense. Why, any woman—*any* woman would be proud——"

"Thank you," he bowed a little stiffly, though with an amused twinkle. "Feeling better?"

"Much! But I think—a little more brandy."

So they went on talking, she doing the leading, he following lamely. She sipped at the brandy. The conversation became increasingly intimate. Several times she touched him caressingly with her hand. He was restless—anxious, perhaps, for her to go—quivering for the conventions. But she lingered on, now quite at home, and radiating with a physical magnetism.

She was the embodiment of the woman whose indiscriminate favours crossed men's swords in other days.

Bit by bit, she unwrapped her true self from its manifold coverings and bared it to his eyes.

Till then, in spite of the curious intimacy she had built up during many months, he had never seen her as she really was.

The climax came in due time. She put down her glass.

"I s'pose—I really must go—now," she laughed. "I'm—all right now. But—" she yawned, stretched herself luxuriously, exactly like a cat, and smiled at him through drooping lids. "I really—don't *want*—to go. Why should I go—at all?"

She stood up languidly. From his lounging attitude, he straightened himself, too, and faced her, very stern, both hands at his side and clenched a little.

The situation—of which she had dreamed and which she had schemed for—had arrived. She felt that she had him fast—the great man whose life was Duty—had melted the heart of ice, hitherto invulnerable. Her vanity was on the point of being satisfied. She moved to satisfy it.

"Hector—" she whispered, "I'll—stay as—long as you like!"

And, both hands upon his shoulders, she tilted up her face and, very close, looked into his.

They stood there motionless, in a silence like death.

The strong face did not alter its expression. If any struggle was going on behind it, no sign of it was visible.

Yet her soul was naked before him.

The truth was that he had read her purpose almost from the start.

For a short time, she had deceived him, when she entered his room. But one glance at her face, one touch of her hands, had instantly told him that she was neither cold nor exhausted. The snow on her coat had not been blown upon it by the wind. He suspected that she had rolled on the ground before knocking at his door.

The discovery had shaken him a little. Plunged always in his work, and with the natural modesty that was his strongest characteristic, he had never regarded her as more than a harmless flirt or possessed of any real feeling for him other than sincere friendliness. She had been an amusing little doll, though capable, now and then, of touching something in him which stirred him uneasily. He fully understood how great an influence she might have on other men; but the idea of anything bordering on an intrigue between them had never entered his head.

Then—suddenly—he found her in his room—the room she rightly described as bare, cold, priestly. She had talked to him intimately, of things he had kept locked away for twelve long, dreary years, lighting up the whole place with her dainty beauty, goading his starved, strictly disciplined soul into thoughts that had lain dormant for what seemed ages, feeding fires that he wanted to keep low, offering him all that Life might have given him, but had not given him, all that might have been and was not. For the past half-hour, there had been hot flames in his blood, fierce throbbings in his brain. She had undoubtedly melted the icicle as no woman had ever done since long, long ago.

She had hammered incessantly at his heart. But—this would have astonished her and crushed her had she only known it—the refrain which her hammering had brought into

his head was, not her name, but this one, endlessly repeated:

"Frances! Frances! Frances!"

Always, over and over again, maddeningly:

"Frances!"

The sweet purity that he had lost was tearing at him——

Not the evil clinging to him now.

To him this woman's naked soul was what it was—contemptible, dirty, miserably small and mean, without strength, governed only by two things: vanity and passion.

Yet she had stirred him more than she could possibly guess.

Her eyes were beautiful—like Frances' eyes; she was graceful and pretty—like Frances—with a mouth that invited desperately——

Both lived years while she rested her hands on his shoulders and gazed upwards and he stood there, utterly impassive.

Then he placed his hands on hers, gently put them down——

She laughed, thinking this his last struggle.

"The temptation of St. Adair!" she said slowly. "Take me."

He held her hands in a grasp that gave her agony.

"You forget," he said, very quietly and distinctly, "that MacFarlane is my friend—and a brother officer."

This was defeat. For the first time she, too, saw him for what he was—"Spirit-of-Iron."

Before she quite realized what he was doing, he pushed her gently into the big chair and called:

"Blythe!"

Suppressing a yawn, bringing back the sound, easy atmosphere of everyday life to the room, Blythe appeared.

"Yessir?"

"Mrs. MacFarlane missed her way in the blizzard. I want you to escort her home. Then you can go."

She allowed him to put on her wraps. She was still dazed.

"Good-night," he said pleasantly, extending his hand. "Pleased to have been of service."

His manner gave Blythe no inkling of what had happened. "Good-night," she murmured, mechanically giving him her hand.

She knew herself, now, just as well as he did. He had shown her plainly enough, yet in the gentlest manner.

A moment later he was alone—agonisingly alone.

IV

Mrs. MacFarlane's white hands had set an avalanche going.

None had been more affected by Mr. Molyneux's propaganda than Mrs. MacFarlane's cook. Molyneux had laid the death of the Marquis at Hector's door. Alice loved the Marquis. She relied implicitly on everything she saw in print. The *Prophet* blamed Hector; accordingly, she hated him.

On the night when Mrs. MacFarlane visited Hector's quarters, the cook saw her go in and come out. Alice knew that her mistress was at least 'taken' with the Superintendent. She put two and two together and found her chance to hurt her enemy—as she regarded him.

When MacFarlane returned, Alice told him of what she had seen.

The avalanche started.

MacFarlane, desperately jealous, desperately in love, found excuses for his wife, none for Hector. In spite of all the evidence of his senses, he decided that Hector was to blame.

To trust his old comrade, who had never failed him yet—to put his suspicions before him, man to man, and abide by the result: this, the happiest solution, strangely, never occurred to him.

Besides, he wanted to finish him!

But how? Openly? Impossible! Then, secretly—under cover. He must find some means of disgracing Hector, some subtle way of hurting him which would be worse than death.

Hector, while MacFarlane was scheming, had no idea of

impending treachery. MacFarlane hid his resentment well. Hector thought he knew nothing.

Then, one day, came enlightenment, through a paragraph published by his old enemy, the *Prophet*:

'An interesting story anent a prominent gentleman frequently dealt with in these columns has just reached us through an unimpeachable medium. It will come as no surprise to many of our readers, but will enlighten others who do not know the real character of the individual placed in a high position of authority in this district by an unmerciful Providence and an inefficient Department. This individual poses as one whose feet have always walked in the straight way. It appears that the pose is far from genuine. The plain truth is that when he first came to the country, in the early days, he carried on a liaison with a pretty little squaw, the daughter of a chief. This understanding (we use the mildest word) continued for several years until the gentleman—his status entitles him to be thus spoken of—apparently tired of it and dropped the matter. But Nemesis arose. During the suppression of certain disturbances of a decade ago, in which he played a leading part, the lady reappeared, only to die in his arms. One story states that, fearing embarrassment, he shot her himself; another, that he owes his success in the operations to the information she gave him. Be that as it may, the romance (again we omit an uglier word) ended there. So runs the tale—which we *know* to be true. A man of this type, who looks no higher than an Indian girl and carries on an intrigue of this character, is not fit to hold the position he does. His chief has long protected him; but we look to his colleagues to insist that one who so blots the fair name of their organization is sent to the obscurity whence he came.'

Hector at once saw that this outburst referred to himself. The woman in the case was, of course, Moon. Someone had told Welland, lately back from the East, of her infatuation and death. Welland had recognized the opportunity of wounding him with the most deadly weapon he could employ, putting the worst construction on the story, and giving just

enough information to enable the curious to identify the villain of the piece if they took the trouble.

The refined ingenuity of the assault was extraordinary. Hector could not silence the story, because that would be an admission of his concern in it. He could not deny it for the same reason. All he could do was to suffer in silence, while it went the round and his name was connected with it and he was made the victim of every slander men could lay tongue to. That was the terrible part. He could have faced anything physical, something he could fight, without a qualm.

And then would come Moon's degradation. For Moon, though she was 'only an Indian,' he would have battled against any odds, because she had served and loved him. To save her from intolerable libel he would have given his life. He could do nothing.

He wondered if his intimacy with Moon had been pre-ordained so that, in time, it might be in the instrument to strike him down. It seemed so, for Welland could have found no more effective weapon.

One hope remained. The story might not gain ground. If it gained ground, he would be forced to resign.

He searched for the traitor in his mind and suddenly recognized him—MacFarlane. The traitor was his friend—his friend—whose honour he had protected under a temptation which might well have been irresistible.

MacFarlane was the only man who knew of his first relations with Moon; from the men who had witnessed her death, he had learned the rest. MacFarlane had twisted facts into a hideous, lying brand and placed that brand in the hands of his worst enemy.

Hector did not have far to seek for his motive.

The treachery of a trusted friend is the bitterest treachery any man can face.

Hector had to face it.

And he could not even clear himself in his friend's eyes, for that would show up Mrs. MacFarlane in her true colours and break MacFarlane's heart.

He felt himself suddenly deserted, standing up alone

under a rain of blows, blows from behind as well as from in front—blows from behind—crushing——

And set his teeth to endure.

v

“Mac,” said Hector, “come over to my quarters and smoke a pipe. I want a word with you.”

MacFarlane could not well refuse. He followed his chief through the snow.

“Now, Mac”—when they were comfortably seated—“we’ll talk a certain matter over, man to man.”

MacFarlane, under heavy, frowning brows, searched his face. Hector was pale, with shadows under his eyes, as if he had not slept well for several nights. MacFarlane sensed vaguely the gist of what his chief was going to say.

“All right, Hec’,” he said, striving to be thoroughly at home. “What is it?”

“You’ve seen this?”

Hector pushed over a folded newspaper—the *Prophet*, containing the story of Moon.

Despite himself, MacFarlane could not quite conceal his uneasiness. After a moment he pushed the paper back.

“Well?” he challenged.

“Do you know to whom that paragraph refers? No? It refers to me. The girl is Moon-on-the-Water, daughter of Sleeping Thunder, of the Assiniboines. You remember her, of course?”

“Perfectly.”

“The story in outline is true. The details are false. There never was anything between that woman and me. She was accidentally shot by my trumpeter in the uprising. She told me the way the rebels had taken, and died—I suppose, in my arms. I *did* owe a great deal to her, because of that information. I never pretended that I did not. You know that, Mac.”

MacFarlane stared fiercely at the floor.

“Mac, the Indians, at least of those days, had fine prin-

ciples. Among other things, they believed in purity—their women took an oath of purity and the penalties for those who broke it were very heavy. Our superior white people have nothing like that oath or law. They don't take a public vow of that kind; they don't suffer as the Indian woman suffered when she overstepped the law. That poor Indian girl, who knew nothing of the refinements of civilization, so called, was as good as gold—far better than many white women.”

MacFarlane clenched his fists restlessly. Every word drove into him like a driven nail.

“Mac, that story's a lie!” Hector's hand crashed suddenly to the table. “Never, never, never was there anything between that girl and me. I know I can't prove it. I know that twenty papers have taken up the yarn and if the man who printed it had his way it would be all over Canada, with the names filled in—the gossips have coupled us with it now, as it is. That's the hell of it—I can't fight it—can't prove what I say or speak a word in defence of either of us. But it's a lie! Now, listen, Mac. The only man who knew of my earlier relations with Moon sits in this room at this moment. *You* gave that story to Molyneux—my worst enemy—and I thought you were a friend of mine.”

MacFarlane had never suspected that Hector would guess. But now, when cornered, he made no attempt to deny the charge—though it marked him as a traitor.

“Mac—why did you do it?”

Hector's voice came quietly to him. Then the thought of his fancied wrongs flamed into his brain.

“You know why I did it, damn you—you know! How in God's name can you sit there and ask me ‘Why’?”

He pounded the chair with his fists.

“Yes, I *do* ask you ‘Why.’ Mac, this thing has tortured me for many nights now. I suspected you and I can't rest till you tell me the truth. And you don't leave this room till you do.”

MacFarlane uttered a tremendous growl, rose heavily and stamped furiously 'round the room.

"*Christ!*" he almost shrieked, wheeling suddenly to glare at Hector, chest heaving, face aflame. "Do I *need* to tell you? My soul, you've got gall! What happened in this room while I was away?"

It was out now!

He expected to see his companion flinch; but, except for the slightest tightening of the jaw, Hector's face gave no sign. Instead, he rose slowly and walked over until he was face to face with MacFarlane, looking down on him.

"You ask, 'What happened?' I'll tell you. Your wife lost her way returning from the Quadrille Club. Wandered 'round until exhausted. Finally stumbled on my quarters, the only place showing a light. She was nearly frozen. I gave her brandy and warmed her up. Then my servant, Blythe, took her home. If you wish to descend to such evidence"—this was a two-edged shaft, though Hector did not know it, and it seared MacFarlane's soul—"you can ask him if this isn't so. Or ask your wife."

MacFarlane seemed on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

"Surely, Mac, you can trust me. You've known me twenty years and never have you had cause——"

"No, I don't trust you! I can't trust you! Haven't I eyes, ears, senses? I don't believe you! I know what passed in this room. Your excuse is a lie—do you hear?—a lie!"

"Mac, you call me treacherous—in effect, you do—a false friend—the lowest animal on earth. And yet you've no proof. On the other hand, you admit treachery to me. How can you reconcile the two?"

"How can I? Because you've given me cause for treachery, as you call it, by your own treachery. An eye for an eye, my lad! I told Molyneux that story and I think I'd good reason for it. And if it breaks you, well and good. You and your virtuous In'juns! Pah! Moon-on-the-Water better than many white women——"

"Be careful, Mac; be careful!"

Hector's face was paler now than ever, and at mention of Moon's name he seized MacFarlane by the shoulders in an iron grip.

But MacFarlane wrenched himself away and raved on.

"Hell! You're no saint! You're just a man, like the rest of us! The story's true! *You* can have a taste of what *I've* put up with, now! And you can do what you please."

"Mac, is that your last word?"

"You're damn right it is!"

"Very well. If this thing finishes me, I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I'm not the first man who's had a friend named Judas. Some day, Mac, you'll realize the truth. And then I hope you'll have regret for what you've done and said. Please close the door as you go out."

Two days later MacFarlane and Mrs. MacFarlane were suddenly transferred to Edmonton.

VI

Hector was surprised to receive this letter from MacFarlane:

'MY DEAR ADAIR:

'This is going to be the hardest thing I ever wrote. Two months ago, you remember, you told me some day I'd realize the truth. The day has come. The Commissioner put me right. When he was up here last week, I went to him like a skunk to try and help the *Prophet* story along; but it didn't work. The Commissioner's too strong a man and too good a friend of yours to listen to gossip. Then he told me that *you'd* arranged my transfer here and indicated that he had guessed why. You had told him nothing of what had passed between us, he said. He also pointed out to me just how you would have acted had you been the hound I said you were—sending me away on duty and that kind of thing, as is sometimes done in the Services. Take this from me, Hector, I know where I am now and what I've been—a blind fool and a swine. God knows if I can ever save you from the consequences of what I did; but I'm going to do my best. The Commissioner thinks the story will die a

natural death. I hope so, if I can't kill it myself. I can't ask your pardon—I don't deserve it. But love is blind—and sometimes crazy. I know I was. Keep a good heart, Hector. You're too good a man to be downed by a story of that kind anyway.

'Yours,

MAC.'

So MacFarlane had come to earth at last!

Chapter IV

I

In the early springtime, over a year after Hector's receipt of MacFarlane's bitter apology, a notorious half-breed horse-thief and cattle-rustler named Whitewash Bill was being conveyed, under escort, to the cells at Broncho. A favourable opportunity presenting itself, the said Whitewash Bill succeeded in making his escape. Hector turned out scouts and patrols, which traced the wanted man to the nearest Indian reserve. At the reserve they ascertained that he had secured food and horses and had again taken flight. All detachments were warned and the entire machinery of the Broncho district was set going with the object of landing Whitewash Bill.

Thus began one of the most famous Western Canadian man-hunts; on one side the Mounted Police, parties of special constables recruited from the settlers and cowboys, Indian scouts and trackers, all directed and controlled by the sleepless brain and strong hand of the great 'Spirit-of-Iron'; on the other one lone desperado of tremendous endurance and fanatical courage, secretly aided by his own kinsmen and by others whose sympathy was with the criminal class.

Money was also on the side of the law—and money talks very freely. The big ranchers, who had suffered much at the hands of Whitewash Bill, put up a reward of several thousand dollars for the capture of the quarry, dead or alive.

The hunt ranged from the foothills to the heart of the great plains, over the 27,000 square miles of the Broncho district. The days became weeks, the weeks months; the horse-thief rode and starved himself to the point of exhaustion; the Mounted Police searched and prodded, cast and recast their net, watched, tracked, questioned—and Whitewash Bill remained untaken. The district fretted, nerves on

edge, the whole country ready to see a Whitewash Bill in every swaying tree or under any shadowed boulder. The real Whitewash Bill danced to and fro through the fog of uncertainty like a will-o'-the-wisp. He stole the horses of a civilian posse from the stable while it sought a much-needed meal in a settler's kitchen. Constable Jinks, making bread on detachment, heard a noise behind him and saw Whitewash Bill in the act of riding off with a bag of oats from the store-house in rear. Jumping out, the policeman fired a shot, but his hands were thick with dough and he missed. Cornered in a tent by a party under Lone-Elk-Facing-the-Wind, the criminal cut his way out through the back and shot off the scout's hat as he sped away. Trapped in a barn wherein he sought temporary refuge and a sleep, he was smoked out but managed somehow to give his enemies the slip under cover of the flames from the barn, which he set on fire. In the course of his meanderings, he killed a settler who refused to help him and shot down a buck policeman, who was now in hospital on the verge of dying. After that, Broncho district lay in bed and trembled, not daring to move, while Whitewash Bill rummaged like a great rat in the larder and galloped off into the night as soon as satisfied.

When the chase had lasted long enough to cause anxiety and give the critics of the Police a chance, the worst happened.

Mr. Steven Molyneux saw the glorious opportunity and opened fire with all his broadsides on the director of the hunt, 'Spirit-of-Iron.'

II

Mr. Molyneux's energies had not been fully turned against Hector for over a year—not, in fact, since his attempt to discredit his opponent through the story told him by Mac-Farlane had failed. In relying on that story, the politician had not taken into account the lapse of time. Most people had forgotten the minor events which preceded the coming of the railway, and even the romantic tale of the Indian girl who died in the arms of a Mounted Police officer during

the revolt was remembered by few. He had also failed to account for the feelings held by this handful for Adair—feelings which kept their mouths close shut. Again, he had not calculated on the sporting spirit which favours the weaker side. Finally, he had overlooked the ignorance of Easterners on Western matters. The story had lived a long time, but the principals had remained anonymous in spite of the politician's broadest hints. So the dirty coup was by this time in its grave.

Molyneux—formerly Joseph Welland—was much too clever to go on fighting with a broken sword. He decided that the only way to kill his man was by catching him in some glaring inefficiency. So he had lain low, awaiting that inefficiency, which, he argued, must come sooner or later.

In the meantime, he went on organising his political forces and undermining Hector's position.

His power constantly increased. He was fast making money, in real estate, railway stocks and cattle. In a few years he hoped to become a director in one of the big lines. Sedulously serving their interests, he had been rewarded by admission to their inner ring. He had built up a small combine in cattle, which was soon to become a large one, giving him a decisive voice in the market throughout the Territories. And so with grain. Politically, he possessed much strong support.

The skyrocket was climbing steadily towards its zenith.

On the face of it, the politician should have found it easy to crush the policeman, for he enjoyed wide power.

That power was now let loose.

Welland chose his time admirably. A restless, frightened country found in the *Prophet's* first tirade only an echo of their own sentiments. What more natural than that the Eastern papers should gradually follow suit? What more natural than that paternal M. P.'s, animated by only the purest motives, should in their turn rise to their feet in the Dominion House and ask the Right Hon. This and the Hon. That whether, in view of the so-and-so in the Territories, they did not think, etc., etc., etc.? These things fanned the flames. In due course it became evident that public opinion,

as a whole, believed that the Mounted Police were lamentably failing. Thence it was an easy step to the day when wise-acres in every part of the Dominion showered the hunters with advice and criticism. And gradually the matter crystallised into one indisputable fact: that if Mr. Whitewash Bill was not taken, and taken soon, someone would have to resign.

That someone was Superintendent Adair.

Led by the big ranchers—Jim Jackson could not control them—the people and the papers did their best to assist the hunt by hounding on the Police in general and the commander of the Broncho district in particular. ‘What are the Police doing?’ shrieked the papers. They censured Hector’s dispositions, recommending marvellous sweepings and watchings, as if the hunt had an army at its command or was playing blind-man’s buff in a nursery rather than a perilous game of you or me over an area as large as Scotland. When he exercised patience, they demanded vigorous action. When he gave them vigorous action, they talked of needless loss of life.

So they hounded him. Yet the hounding did no good. What is the use of lashing a dog when he is definitely checked on a lost scent?

Behind it all, carefully encouraging the detractors, stood the disinterested but righteously indignant Mr. Molyneux.

On the other hand, one paper alone maintained a violent counter-offensive—the *Branding-Iron*. Tom Williams believed in plain words, thrown straight. He threw them. At a critical stage, unfortunately, Mr. Molyneux sued Mr. Williams for libel. Pending trial, the judge ordered the *Branding-Iron* to leave the politician alone. Justice was thus deprived of a powerful ally. Injustice ranted on.

In the midst of this storm, apparently sublimely indifferent either to friend or foe, invulnerable, immovable, acting only as he thought best and not as others thought, cunning when he thought it wisest to be cunning, reckless when, in his view, the need arose, the leader of the hunt, ‘Spirit-of-Iron,’ stood up alone, ‘four-square’—as Williams put it—‘to every wind that blew.’

Whitewash Bill?—merely the pawn in this great contest between Right and Wrong!

Upon his escape or capture depended now—as Hector knew and Molyneux knew—whether Superintendent Adair or Joseph Welland was to be victorious in their private battle.

III

One afternoon in May, when the hunt had been in progress nearly three months and the unrest was at its height, there came to Superintendent Adair a certain Broncho clergyman. His name was Northcote. He was a big man—big physically, mentally, spiritually, with a fine, deep voice that reminded one of his own pipe organ, and a noble head, as dignified as a Cæsar's. In fact, he looked like a Cæsar, for he was clean-shaven, ruddy and strong of face and besides was blessed with a look of kindness seldom seen in portraits of the old Emperors. Sensible, broad-minded, tolerant, the Rev. Mr. Northcote well deserved his nickname of the 'Human Parson.' Naturally, he was now, and always had been, on Hector's side.

Hector had just come in from thirty-six hours in the saddle, covered with mud, hungry and quite comfortably tired—he had almost lived in the saddle for weeks now—but he welcomed the clergyman, who never bothered him without good cause.

They shook hands warmly. Northcote began.

"I've no idea of the present situation as regards Whitewash Bill, Major, except that he's still at liberty and I don't want to worry you with questions that don't concern me. But I want to give you some information I think you ought to know; and it's on good authority." The clergyman dropped his voice and spoke with great caution. "There's a certain element—smaller ranchers, low-class men in Broncho, cowboys who know no better—that is planning just now—to lynch Whitewash Bill when you take him!"

"I see. The details?"

"Well, so far as they go, are simply this: as soon as White-

wash Bill is arrested, they'll ride out to the scene of action, take him away from the escort, and string him up. If they don't do that, they're to storm the barracks and hang him from a telegraph pole."

"The idea being, I suppose, to take it out of the man who's terrorized the country and to set an example to would-be outlaws of the future?"

"That's about it, Major."

"Perhaps it will also show that we can't protect our prisoners when we *have* got them or see that the law takes its course—eh?"

"That also may have influenced them."

"Do you know who's at the bottom of it? Or the ring-leaders?"

"No. But men with the country's good at heart who are yet afraid to be seen giving information to you or even to mention any names to me, have tipped me off."

"And you—?"

The big parson smiled.

"Well, you've had enough trouble, Major, without this thing being added; and there's never been a lynching in Canada—"

"It's good of you, Northcote. It happens I already know of this plot. Despite what's said of us, we're not *quite* asleep."

"Good. Well, I won't waste your time any further."

"Just a minute," said Hector. "You may be interested in the present situation."

"Yes!" said the parson eagerly.

"It's this. Whitewash Bill has worked his way to very near the boundary. Three days ago we thought we had him cornered. He slipped away during the night—the party on the spot was too small to hem him in. Since then we've completely lost him. I'm afraid, if we don't pick him up again in a very short time, it will mean—"

"Don't say—"

"—That he's slipped into the States. And that means the end—and my resignation."

"Oh, that's impossible."

"It isn't. The uproar is so great that the man who fails will have to suffer. We're at the climax now. It will all be over in two or three days."

"But the people won't stand for it, Major. They know you've done your best. They trust you."

"Do they? We'll see. Of course, there's hope yet. The men are at boiling point. If they sight Whitewash Bill again, he'll never get away. I've ordered him taken alive, though, which makes it rather more difficult."

"You've every honest man behind you, Major."

"Pleased to hear it. Well, there's the situation."

At the door, the clergyman paused.

"Can you give me any message—to those who sent me?"

"You can tell them—first, that Whitewash Bill will be taken alive; second, there will be *no* lynching."

The Rev. Mr. Northcote beamed.

"There's a big mob thinks otherwise, I'm pretty sure, Major. But what Manitou-pewabic says is pretty sure to go. The rest of us are satisfied."

And he closed the door softly behind him.

IV

At dawn, two days after Mr. Northcote's visit, a despatch rider clattered into barracks with word that Cranbrook had again cornered Whitewash Bill, this time at a point fifteen miles south of the Piegan Crossing.

This put an end to a terrible period of suspense, which had held Hector inactive at Broncho—where, as director of operations, he had been forced to remain while his whole future was being decided somewhere out in the vast darkness.

He could now take action. He had already decided what to do. He feared neither the outlaw nor the would-be lynch-ers. The latter, especially, he held in contempt.

Awaiting news, he had spent the whole night awake, and fully dressed. It was a matter of a moment to fling on cap, gauntlets and revolver and hurry over to the orderly-room, where Forshaw was keeping watch, a matter of a minute

or two to order out Donaldson's four-horse team and the two constables, Dunsmuir and Kellett, who were standing by.

The railway from Broncho approached the Piegan Crossing by such a circuitous route that it was quicker to proceed to the scene of action across country. Except for Donny's team and the Superintendent's own horse, which was played out with the hard work of the past few weeks, the only horses in barracks were crocks. Every sound animal was out with the hunting patrols. Hector wanted to take Forshaw and the two constables with him because he knew Cranbrook was short-handed. The only way to do so was for the whole party to drive with Donaldson the thirty miles to the spot where Whitewash Bill was lurking.

In less than twenty minutes after the receipt of the despatch they were on the trail.

The trumpeter sounded 'Reveill ' as they rattled out of the barrack-gate—just as his long-silent predecessor had sounded it when, as a buck constable, Hector left Fort Macleod with Sergeant-Major Whittaker to make his first arrest twenty long years before. Was this a sign that the present arrest would be his last?

As the sun rose, they came full upon an immense herd of drifting cattle. It was the time of the spring round-up and the punchers all over the Broncho district were hard at work. The herders, statuesque on their ponies against the cool glow of the morning, crooned a cowboys' lullaby while the trap slowly made its way through the herd. They touched their hats to the Superintendent. In a little gully, beside the chuck-wagon, the cook was boiling coffee.

Hector's mind went back to the day when, in company with the old 'originals' of the Force, he had cleaved his way through as immense a herd, a herd of the vanished buffalo.

What changes he had seen! Twenty years in the North-West, growing with it and watching it grow, developing with it and helping it to develop! A lifetime given to his country—and was he to be broken, now, by an upstart parasite battenning on the blood and sweat of better men?

"Push on, Donaldson, push on!"

"Can't go any quicker till we're out o' this, sir," answered Donny sturdily.

But get there—get there—get there—before it's too late!

Clear of the herd, they dashed onward again at breakneck speed, Donny handling the ribbons like a veritable Jehu. Round corners on two wheels; down into hollows with a terrific bump; up steep slopes at a canter; mile after mile left behind; and the two constables in the back seat, hanging on like leeches, looked at each other through the dust and grinned.

"Chief's crazy!" muttered Dunsmuir, sideways, through his teeth. "This is pounding my ruddy tail off!"

They sighted the river—broad and deep and silver-grey, winding slowly through shouldering rollers of drab brown land. Donny swung his sweating horses down towards the ford—swung them, drove them on—halted—

"What are you stopping for?"

The chief's voice lashed him unmercifully.

"It looks very tricky, sir," Donny answered doubtfully, with a thoughtful hand to his big moustache. "Over the horses' heads, I should say, sir. How about the other ford, sir?"

"Ten miles up? *No!*"

"He's going to drown the lot of us," whispered Kellett.

Hector seemed to catch the thought though he had not heard the words.

"If you're afraid to go on, any of you, you can get out," he said.

Afraid to go on! Who would admit it, when he put it that way?

"All right, Forshaw?"

"All right, sir!"

"Then push on, Donaldson!"

Donny squared his jaw and put the whip to the horses. They plunged forward, into the river.

In a moment the icy water reached the hub of the wheels; then the horses' bellies; then lapped over the floor of the trap; and surged around the breasts of the gallant leaders.

"Hup there, Sir John! Hup, Laurier! Hup there, Aberdeen!" shouted Donny.

The horses were swimming now, thrashing out desperately, in the middle of the river. The wagon floated after them, like a crazy barge, rocking to and fro and occasionally grounding on unseen boulders.

"Sit still behind," ordered Hector grimly, the water round his knees. "Sit tight and don't move!"

"If she turns over, we're done," said Kellett to Dunsmuir. "Don't do that, you fool. Think we want to be drowned because you're afraid of wetting your plutocratic hoofs? How deep is it hereabouts?"

"About twenty feet, I guess!" drawled Dunsmuir.

Near the bank, Donny flogged the plunging horses and called on them with the most lurid language in the calendar. A crashing collision with a sunken rock that almost turned them over, Hector throwing his weight in the right direction in the nick of time; a wild struggle on the part of the leaders to gain a footing on the slippery ground; Donaldson, responding to a fierce 'Give me the reins!' went overboard, neck-deep, to drag his horses round; a last upheaval; and they rolled out on dry land, out of the reluctant fingers of imminent death.

Hector gave Donaldson a nip of whiskey, and a short rest. Then the trap dashed forward anew.

Far off, on the horizon, as they advanced, they saw a long train of crawling, white-tilted wagons, belonging to one of the many parties of farmer-settlers now pouring into the country,—symbol of still another change, impending, when the stockmen's supremacy would be challenged by the growers of grain. A few years more and the plains would be fenced and agleam with acres and acres of wheat, the Territories would leap to Provinces and Western Canada would take her place as a great power in the land, providing those twin necessities, bread and meat, to the whole wide world.

A lifetime given to the furtherance of these changes—and was the evil force which had come with them to cut him down?

"Push on, Donaldson, push on!"

The river was five miles behind them now, the sun well risen. Suddenly the distances conceived a horseman, who came rapidly towards them, leading two horses.

It was Dandy Jack, one of Cranbrook's party for some weeks past. Cranbrook, anticipating his chief, had sent the young puncher to meet them with horses for the Superintendent and the Adjutant, so that they might get the sooner to the scene of action.

"What news, Jack?"

Hector shot out the question as the trap pulled up.

Jack flung a hand to his sombrero and smiled. Though he had been constantly in the saddle for days, the angel-faced boy looked as fresh and faultlessly turned out as ever.

"Got him still cornered, Major. He's in a little hollow 'bout an hour's hard ride from here. Quite a big bunch o' cattlemen come up last night an' this mornin'. Mr. Cranbrook said I was to guide you an' to ask you to hurry, if it don't hurt you any."

"All right, Jack! No, never mind the stirrups! Donaldson, follow as quickly as you can. Come along, Forshaw! We've got to get there in time!"

With that, they swung to the saddle and thundered off across the prairie.

"God, I'd give my eyes to be in at the death!" groaned Kellett, as he watched his chief disappear.

v

Behind a ridge Hector found assembled a large and noisy crowd. Cranbrook, mounted, stood in the centre, heatedly arguing. Then he saw Hector, with obvious relief. Shouldering his horse through the throng, he cantered over. The stockmen, recognizing Hector, fell to uneasy muttering among themselves. If any man could baulk them of their prey it was Adair; and they knew it—and were correspondingly disgruntled.

"I've got a ring of scouts round his hiding-place, sir," Cranbrook said. "Lone-Elk-Facing-The-Wind picked up his trail near here just before dusk last night. He can't

escape, but he's too dangerous to rush. So I thought I'd wait till you came."

"You did right," replied Hector. "And these—are the lynchers, I suppose? Yes? Then leave them to me."

The stern face set. Here was something physical to meet and overcome—at last.

"Boys," he told the crowd, checking his horse in front of them, "what's this I hear about lynching? That's tenderfoot talk. The man will be taken alive and properly tried. If he's guilty of murder, rest assured he'll get what's coming to him. But he's entitled to a fair trial and he's going to have it. There's never been a lynching in Canada and there's not going to be one now."

A storm of hostile shouts and a yell: "Who'll stop us?"

"I will. I will—and my men."

More tumult; and the crowd, hands on guns, grew threatening.

"Your men. Hell! You've only got five or six. We're twenty to one."

"There'll be no lynching all the same."

The crowd hooted. A huge puncher, built on the lines of a grizzly bear, shouted Hector down and began to harangue his companions, asking if they were afraid of one man and were going to let him dictate to freeborn citizens who had been deeply wronged.

"Look out!" shouted a little man on the outskirts, seeing the fighting look fast taking possession of Hector's face. But the words were lost in the tumult.

Hector quietly dismounted, tossing the reins to Cranbrook, who had also dismounted, and faced the big puncher.

"Another word from you, my friend, and—"

For answer the man whirled a violent blow at Hector's head and his hand flashed to his hip. Hector smashed in his right, all the pent-up emotion of days behind it. The big puncher hurled crashing to the ground among his friends.

"Anyone else want any? All right. We'll take him up for inciting to riot. Now, boys, do as I tell you and go home."

The spirit of the mob was broken. One prompt, telling

blow, backed by absolute firmness in the face of great odds and the thing was done.

To deal with Whitewash Bill remained. And on Whitewash Bill depended everything.

Hector turned to Cranbrook and, to Cranbrook's astonishment, he was smiling.

"Now for the outlaw. I want you to point out where he is."

Cranbrook, handing the horses over to Dandy Jack, led him forward. Forshaw followed.

"Easy here, sir. Keep low," said Cranbrook.

They stole on until they could look round the shoulder of the ridge.

"He's in those bushes," Cranbrook stated, pointing to a small thicket about seventy-five yards away.

"I see," said Hector. "Well, now's the time."

And he took off his greatcoat and gauntlet, revealing his scarlet tunic.

Cranbrook and Forshaw looked at each other and Forshaw paled a little under his ruddiness.

"What—are you going to do, sir?"

"I'm going to arrest him myself. Pah, I'll be all right. He daren't shoot me. Cranbrook, go round your scouts and tell them to keep a lookout in case he runs for it."

"But—God, sir, he'll kill you! He's stopped at nothing. He'll certainly shoot *you*. And what a target you're making of yourself!" exclaimed Cranbrook, his concern overcoming his deference.

"Best starve him out, sir," added Forshaw.

But Hector had long ago made up his mind. Better to be shot than to face dishonour; better to attempt the arrest himself than to force it on his subordinates. The crisis of the hunt had come and he did not intend to risk failure by leaving the work to another.

If Welland was to win, it would be through no fault of his.

He had faced death before this, with less cause. He could easily face it now.

"Starve him out? And have him give us the slip again? No. Go along, Cranbrook, go along."

Cranbrook had to obey. Forshaw, sensing a little of what this business meant to his chief, said no more. But he felt that the Superintendent was going to his death—deliberately sacrificing himself to his duty.

Cranbrook returned.

"All right, sir."

"Good. When I throw up my right hand, come after me."

The lynchers—lynchers no longer, but firm admirers of the law—gathered in a tense, awe-struck group behind the Police officers.

Hector loosed, but did not draw, his revolver. Then he walked straight out into the open, holding his arms wide, to show the hidden half-breed that he held no weapon.

Absolute stillness held the world. In the sunshine, the steadily advancing scarlet coat gleamed like a flame, inviting disaster. Forshaw and Cranbrook awaited the sound of a rifle-shot.

When within a few paces of the outlaw's hiding-place, Hector heard the click of the breech-bolt. A brown face, ferociously set, peeped from among the leaves.

"Keep off, you, keep off!" whispered Whitewash Bill.

But the man in scarlet had three great forces on his side—the tremendous moral force of the coat he wore, badge, as it was, of the terrible North-West Mounted Police, the Keepers of the Law, the whole corps embodied in one lone individual; the great moral force of absolute fearlessness and determination shown in the teeth of certain destruction; the stupendous moral force of the personality which the Indians dreaded and respected and which the outlaw himself had long known—the personality typified in the name 'Spirit-of-Iron.'

These three moral forces faced the half-breed now.

"Keep off," he repeated, "or I shoot."

"You daren't shoot me," the white man's voice came to him, remorselessly. "D'you hear, Bill? You *dare* not shoot me. See! My hands are empty—but you dare not shoot me, just the same. . . ."

VI

That night, in every part of Canada, the printing-presses roared out their headlines, headlines which were once to have doomed and damned:

WHITEWASH BILL CAPTURED! SUPERINTENDENT ADAIR'S
GREAT VICTORY! GALLANT COMMANDER OF HUNT
TAKES MURDEROUS OUTLAW SINGLE-HANDED!
WITHOUT USING A WEAPON! A LYNCHING
AVERTED! ENEMIES DISCOMFITED!
SPIRIT-OF-IRON!

BOOK FOUR: *Coup-de-Grâce*

BOOK FOUR: *Coup-de-Grâce*

Chapter I

I

The great spring rush down the Black Elk River to the gold-fields of Discovery had begun.

From the town of Nugget, where they had passed the winter, a great host of fortune-seekers, lured thither by the call of Greed from the four corners of the earth, was now on the move. The surface of the river was white with their sails, black with their hulls. Hector, commanding the Mounted Police in Black Elk Territory, sat on a hill above Nugget and watched the fleet set out. Like Moses, he meditated over his innumerable flock of tenderfeet as they passed in review below him.

The backbone, veins, arteries, in fact the whole organism of the Territory centred in the Black Elk River. Rising at Lake Nugget, near the city of that name, the Black Elk ran into Lake Fortune, a fair day's sail to the north, bumped down a half-dozen dangerous rapids, swept through several sword-cut canyons, eased to a jog-trot, broadening comfortably the while and so, becoming ever more placid, ever more imposing, tumbled itself at last into Northern seas, a thousand miles away. Four hundred miles from Nugget, Discovery Creek contributed its quota of waters to the majestic river and at the mouth of the creek stood Discovery City. A chain of gigantic mountains, cleft on the coast side only by a single entrance, Hopeful Pass, walled in the Black Elk country from the Western sea and threw almost insuperable obstacles in the way of any attempt to reach the Territory by land from the civilized Canada to the south, while the country between the mountains and the coast, wherein lay

the town of Prospect, on the sea-board, belonged to the United States. So Hector was isolated in the Black Elk country; with Hopeful Pass as his Thermopylæ.

Two classes of people inhabited this tremendous Territory: the original prospectors or pioneers, and the fortune-hunters or newcomers. The pioneers were a mere handful, long established, grown old and seared in the service of the North, some firmly settled in the new gold area, the rest working claims or seeking strikes in ones and twos all over the Territory. The newcomers, the tenderfeet, outnumbering the old hands by hundreds, the adventurers now on their way to the gold-fields or struggling up through Hopeful Pass in the rear-guard of the advance—these were the people with whom Hector had most to deal.

Only a strong, stern, sane administration could guide and govern such a crowd as this. It represented every nationality, creed and race on earth. When the Archangel blows his trumpet to summon all men to judgment on the Last Day, he will simply reproduce, on a larger scale, the gathering then in progress in Black Elk Territory. There was in this gigantic mob no harmony, no discipline, no uniformity. It was one only in its arrogance, its greed and its ignorance. Hector knew its weaknesses well. He had seen it swindled, robbed and murdered by the Prospect gangsters. He had watched it fighting to make headway on the trail to Hopeful Pass, with dogs it could not drive, pack-horses it could not pack, tools it could not handle. He had seen it freezing in scanty clothing, starving on luxuries that should have been necessities, dying of weakness and disease, quarreling for precedence, fighting for life with 'six-guns' against thugs who made an end of the fight when it pleased them. He had heard it shout for joy when it won at last to the Mounted Police post on the summit of the Pass, sighted the Union Jack and scarlet coats which symbolized Law and Order, put away its weapons as no longer necessary and pushed on through the entry as though it went through the pearly gates, from Hell to Heaven. He had watched it settling down to spend its miserable winter. And, last of all, that morning, when the ice was finally departed, he had seen it embark—

men, women in tights, children, dogs, ponies, cattle, goats, equipment and supplies—and rejoicingly set sail on the closing leg of its desperate journey.

With his men, he had played father, mother and big brother to this extraordinary conglomeration through all the winter, from the moment of their entry into Canadian country. He had now to see them safely to Discovery and to safeguard their interests and the country's interests when they got there.

For this engaging task, he had at his command unlimited authority and two hundred men—two hundred men among thirty thousand, two hundred men in a territory the size of France; unlimited authority, his own ability, two hundred men and the prestige of the Mounted Police.

He mentally ran over the dispositions he had made:

At Hopeful Pass, holding the keys to Heaven against all Hell, one Corporal St. Peter surnamed Dunsmuir with a dozen wingless buck policemen; at Pioneer Lake and Lake Miner—in the mountain chain cutting off Black Elk Territory from the civilized Canada to the south—at Nugget City and the town of Lucky, north of Lake Nugget, and at Discovery Creek—to name the more important points—were other detachments; posts at intervals along the Black Elk above and below Discovery City; and, in barracks at Discovery City, headquarters, the jail and what was left of his two hundred.

Their duties: general maintenance and enforcement of the law, with all it meant; imposition of punishments; arbitration of any dispute, from a fight involving life and death to one involving the possession of a can-opener; care of the sick and destitute; burial of the dead; collection of taxes, Government royalty on gold, and of customs at Hopeful Pass; relaying the mails from post to post or escorting them by steamer to the seagoing vessel at Prospect; guarding and escorting gold deposits; and running the boats of the ignorant herd through the rapids so that no lives might be lost.

The detachments, in order to carry out all these jobs, must travel immense distances in the heat of summer or depth of winter, take their lives in their hands at least once a day and,

for the rest of the time, enjoy the delights of camping in leaking, wind-swept tents, flooded inches deep, pitched in the trough of sunless valleys or on the bleak flanks of frozen mountains; while they received, for their pains, an average stipend of under a dollar a day and were not allowed to stake claims.

The command was no task for a weakling. Hector remembered what the Commissioner had said in sending him to take that command six months before: 'It's the last bit of true pioneering this country will see, Adair. Carry it through, and you'll have played a part in the whole show, from the settlement of the North-West to the end. It will be a big job—one of the biggest we've ever done—this job I'm giving you; but it will be a splendid thing in the way of a crowning achievement to all you've done already. Make it a credit to yourself and Canada.'

The 'big job' was now at hand. The spring rush marked its advent. The winter had been only the prelude. Hector, watching the boats from the hill above Nugget, sensed the coming battle.

Tomorrow he would return to Discovery, there to fight it out.

Dusk hiding the fleet at last from his eyes, he walked down to the rough shanty in Nugget where Cranbrook had his headquarters.

"Corporal Dunsmuir reports a distinguished visitor arrived at Hopeful Pass, sir." Cranbrook greeted him as he reached the door. "At present he's taking a breather but will move on to Discovery in a few days."

"Who is it?" asked Hector.

"Molyneux—the M. P.," answered Cranbrook.

II

"Major Adair, this is Mr. Steven Molyneux," said the Lieutenant-Governor of Black Elk Territory. "I think you've met before, haven't you?"

A week had passed since Hector had watched the commencement of the great spring rush. In the Lieutenant-

Governor's office in Discovery City, he shook hands with his enemy.

The Lieutenant-Governor offered chairs and cigars. There was an awkward pause. Gentleman as he was, he hastened to fill it.

"Mr. Molyneux had a pretty tough time on the way up here, Adair," he said.

"I tell you, Mr. Lancaster," the member for Broncho agreed, "I was never so glad to see the Old Flag as when I got to the top of Hopeful Pass. That place Prospect is beyond description. Everything was wide open and, while I was there, gun-fights through the streets every hour of the twenty-four. I saw fellows lying dead by the roadside with their pockets turned inside out. If it hadn't been for your Police being with me, I'd have been robbed sure. What a contrast between here and there! They say that Greasy Jones just runs Prospect. He must be a corker."

"He is."

"Don't let him in here."

"Don't worry," said Hector. "He daren't cross the line."

"There's some pretty tough birds in Discovery, all the same. Can you handle 'em?"

The Lieutenant-Governor put in his oar.

"I'm sure we can leave that to Major Adair," he said. "There'll be no reproductions of Prospect in Canadian territory while he's here."

"Excuse me, Major Adair." The politician smiled. "I don't mean to be critical. I guess my nerves have been scraped the wrong way in the past few days, that's all."

Hector answered diplomatic smile with smile.

"That's all right, Mr. Molyneux. How long are you here for? We must try to make your stay as pleasant as possible."

"Oh, don't worry about me, Major. I'm here for a good long time. I'm just making a private visit, of course—going to have a look 'round and size things up in this wonderful country. I might try to get in on a good thing if I see it, needless to add."

"Quite naturally," said Hector.

The conversation languished. The Lieutenant-Governor, to enliven it a little, went into the next room in search of liquid refreshment.

Hector was alone with Welland for the first time in many, many months.

"This gives me a good opportunity, Adair," said the politician, as soon as Lancaster had gone, "to say something I've been wanting to say ever since I got here. I really *am* up here just to look around. I've not come up here to spy on you—or worry you. I know just what a hell of a job you have before you and I'm not going to make it harder for you. I've every confidence in your ability to run this show right. I want bygones to be bygones. I guess I was wrong in the past. It's a hard pill for me to swallow, this. I'm a proud man, but—well, what d'you say?"

This halting declaration surprised Hector.

"You can rely on me to play the straight game, Molyneux," he answered. "My duty up here is to look after the interests of the country and community—nothing else. I've no quarrel with any man who keeps the law."

The Lieutenant-Governor returned before they could say more.

"I hope you don't think I was indiscreet, Adair?" Lancaster queried anxiously, when the visitor had taken his departure. "I know all about Molyneux's efforts to knife you in the past; but you see——"

"Well, we had to meet some time," Hector soothed him. "So why not under your roof? Where better?"

"Exactly," said Lancaster, much relieved. "And he can't hurt you here, Adair—while I'm around."

"Oh, that's all over now," Hector replied. "We've just cried quits."

"Splendid!" exclaimed the Lieutenant-Governor.

III

At three o'clock in the morning, when Hector was able for the first time to spare a thought to Welland, he pondered awhile.

His enemy's arrival in Black Elk Territory was a serious thing. Though Welland's attempt to crush him through the Whitewash Bill affair had failed at the eleventh hour, he knew very well that the Commissioner had sent him to the gold area not merely in order to promote him, but mainly to safeguard him against any further attacks. Hector's successful handling of Whitewash Bill had made Welland a laughing-stock and the Commissioner had feared that the result would mean further and greater danger for Hector. He had never dreamt that Mr. Steven Molyneux, M. P., would follow Hector to such a remote point. And Mr. Molyneux—well, here he was!

His purpose? To size up things, to get in on the gold claims, to look around—decidedly, yes. To make Hector's administration—already difficult, as he had admitted—as difficult as possible, or at least to watch that administration, gather together all observations tending to injure Hector, and then to use them at Ottawa for his removal—again, yes; and a thousand times, yes! Hector had not been deceived by the friendly overtures of the afternoon. His enemy had come to Discovery to plot his ruin. Hector was certain of that. After all, why should Welland quit at this stage? If he had desired to revenge himself on Hector or put him out of the way before, he was far more likely to have that desire now. Hector had forced him to eat humble-pie before all Canada. Yet Welland, by this time, had become a dominating figure in Western Canadian politics. Hector was isolated in Black Elk Territory and unable to move from it, while Welland could go to Ottawa when he wished and there bring about his downfall. Welland had never been in a better position to fight the fight, never in a better position to win the fight, than he was at this moment.

At the same time, Hector could have found no better arena for the last struggle than that of Black Elk Territory. Why? Because, in Black Elk Territory he was a power on a far superior footing to Welland, whose status was only that of a private individual. With the Lieutenant-Governor, his firm friend, he held an almost absolute authority. Even Welland, so long as he remained in the Territory, was en-

tirely dependent on Hector for protection—an ironical situation for one who had so often attacked the Police! If Hector went down here, he was doomed to go down anywhere!

What were Welland's real plans? Time would soon tell. At this point Hector went to sleep on it.

Chapter II

I

"What d'you want to see me for?"

In a small, dark room in a Prospect hotel, two men sat facing each other over a table.

One was Welland.

The other was Greasy Jones, master of the gang of gunmen dominating the little American port at the head of the route to the Black Elk gold area.

Greasy Jones was medium-sized, thin and wiry, a rapier rather than a bludgeon. His face was artistic, almost delicate, the nose aquiline, the cheek bones prominent, the forehead high. His hands, spread out on the table before him, were long and thin, the kind of hands that are thoroughly at home on the keyboard of a piano. But his skin was too brown and rough for an artist's or musician's, his chin too prominent, his lips too thin and cruelly set, his strange eyes, under the overhanging brows, too hard and keen. The murderer overshadowed the dreamer in his face, his terrible hands were mobile only for the pulling of triggers.

"What d'you want to see me for?" the gangster repeated. "I'm a busy man—can't afford to waste time."

Welland threw a cigar-case on the table and poured out drinks from a convenient bottle.

"So you came, after all," he remarked coolly. "I doubted if you would."

The gangster pushed back his slouch hat and, leaning over, lit his cigar in the candle flame. The action revealed the heavy belt of ammunition he wore buckled over his dingy coat and his battery of revolvers.

"Well, I don't gen'lly pay no attention," he said, smiling, "to strangers that stops me on the street—unless to fill 'em full o' holes for their nerve. But I sized you up, Mister, as

diff'runt. An' when you ast me where you could meet me for a talk, well—anyways, here I am."

"Good," said Welland. "Now, before we talk business, Mr. Jones—introductions! On my part, I mean. I don't need them from you."

"No, I guess not," the gangster agreed. "Everybody knows me an' my bunch in this here town, that's straight. Well, go ahead."

"Right. There you are."

The politician, pulling out a wallet and a mass of papers, spread them out before the gangster.

Greasy Jones read them leisurely. When he had finished he knew that his companion was Mr. Steven Molyneux, prominent Canadian M. P., visiting the Black Elk country for a 'look 'round.'

This was bigger game than the gangster usually dealt with. He was impressed but suspicious.

"Say," he queried, pushing back the papers, "what's the game, anyway? Seems mighty queer that a guy like you wants dealin's with a guy like me. Take care, my gent, who you try any foolishness on. Get me?"

"Suppose I convince you that we *have* something in common—a good deal, in fact. Will you be satisfied?"

"All depends," said Greasy Jones. "Shoot."

In five minutes' hard talking Mr. Welland convinced the skeptical gangster that he, too, had followed the crooked path very closely in his time.

"That's all right," Greasy admitted, "but you're a straight man *now*—anyhow, in public. This bein' so, what I want to know is: what's the game? What does a fellah 'way up want with a fellah 'way down, as some folks see it, like me? Is it some little job you've got for me—cut someone's throat, eh?"

Welland smiled.

"No, it isn't. I want to help you."

"You do! By God, if you're trying to do the dirty on me——"

Greasy Jones flashed a hand to his hip.

"No, no. Hear me out, can't you?"

"Go ahead."

"All right. And keep your hand off your gun. See here, Mr. Jones. I got into Black Elk Territory about a month ago. I've spent most of my time going 'round having a look at things, with Discovery as my headquarters. Incidentally, I've got in on one or two good claims—but let that keep for a minute. The Mounted Police have given me a free hand to do as I pleased. They allow me to go through Hopeful Pass without question and so on. Just now, I'm supposed to be here looking up some goods of mine that have gone astray—*not* seeing you. You understand—a man in my position——"

"Yes. Go ahead. Cut it short!"

"Well, they don't suspect anything. Now listen. On the strict Q. T., I've sized up the situation along the creeks and down here in Prospect pretty well. And I've found this: there's a large number of men both sides the line that aren't satisfied with the way the Mounted Police are running things."

"That's right," muttered Greasy fiercely. "The yallah-legged sons o' ——!"

"They aren't satisfied," pursued Welland, heedless of the interruption, "and they'd sweep them out of the country if they dared. A lot of men over there on the creeks aren't fit to hold their claims—rich claims. There are others who came into the country weeks after the majority and struck it rich, while the rest go begging. Now, that crowd of discontents along the creeks think this: those fellows who aren't fit to hold those fine rich claims should be told to get off. Those that came into the country last but struck it rich first should be made to hand over *their* claims, too. The first comers, and the strong men, the men that need the money, should have first show on all the gold on Discovery. That's the way they size it up in the Black Elk country."

"Well—what's that to do with me?"

"I'm coming to that. As I was saying, that's how it's sized up there. And why isn't it so? Because—again—of the Mounted Police, who have the lucky ones under their protection, according to the law.

"Now about the men this side the line. Hundreds, even thousands, this side Hopeful Pass have just as much right to get in on the Black Elk gold as any man alive. But they can't. Again—why?"

"Because the yallah-legs won't let 'em," muttered the gangster.

"Just so. The Mounted Police call them undesirables and shut the door in their faces."

"Well, where do *we* come in? Cut it short, man; cut it short."

Welland took several leisurely puffs at his cigar. Then, leaning over, he said with marked emphasis:

"We are in sympathy with that discontented crowd—you are—and *I* am!"

"*I* am—cert'nly," exclaimed Greasy, looking at him suspiciously; "but *you*—say!"

"Yes, I am. I'm for justice."

"Like sin!" the gangster sneered. "You're a Canadian M. P. You're on the side o' the law. Your bread's buttered on that side, and you *eat* it."

"Not at all," declared Welland. "I'm on the side of right, I tell you. I think the laws that govern Black Elk should be made at Discovery, not at Ottawa, and by the miners, *not* the Police. And the miners that make 'em should be the strong miners, whether in the majority or not. Might makes right in a new country and it ought to here. You agree?"

"I run this town with a hundred gunmen—I've been kep' out o' the Black Elk country by the yallah-legs—an' he asks me do I agree? Cert'nly, I agree!"

"Then why *doesn't* Might make Right over there?"

"Because o' the yallah-legs."

"Just so. Yet there are only two hundred of them. A few men with guts could soon put them where they belong."

"Huh! *You* think so. You don't know 'em like I do."

"Have you ever tried to force Hopeful Pass?"

"What's the good? They've got a Maxim and a dozen men in a place 'bout a yard wide! They'd mincemeat us before we got into gun-range. I prefer down here, sir, where the pickin's is easy!"

"You don't think it could be forced? Well, what would you think of this? Stir up the Black Elk country *from the inside* till every man worth his salt realizes it's time the Police tyranny went out. Then—just tell the Police they must either go or change the laws."

"They wouldn't go."

"Suppose you showed 'em force. Eh?"

"I think they'd fight to the last shot."

Welland was irritated.

"Well, if they *did* fight? They could be wiped off the map in a minute. It would be ten to one at least."

The gangster frowned.

"Suppose they are wiped out—or kicked out—or they change the laws to let all hands come in and give the claims to the deservin'. Well, what then?"

"Then, my friend, the men that had led the—little protest—would be masters of Black Elk Territory!"

Greasy Jones thoughtfully chewed his cigar, his eyes on the flickering candle flame.

"That's so, by God!" he said at last. "But where—again—do *I* come in? I can't get through Hopeful Pass to stir up trouble."

"No. But others can—men the Police don't suspect——"

"And me?"

"You'll run the show from this end. You'll organize the whole thing—secretly, of course—and when the time comes, you'll get through Hopeful Pass and take charge."

"Take charge?"

"Yes. Why, can't you see what this means? It needs a man with real guts, who doesn't care a hoot in hell for anyone, to run this thing. You're the man!"

"That's all right," said the gangster cautiously. "I don't care a hoot in hell for any man, that's true. But I ain't goin' to jump into the Police trap in Discovery."

"You won't have to go into the Black Elk Territory till everything's ready. When the time's ripe, we'll see you get there all right—get there just in time to lead the boys. If necessary we'll smuggle you through."

"An' what'll I get out of it?"

"Haven't I said you'd be at the top of the whole thing—boss of Black Elk from end to end? Remember what that means."

"I know what it means," the gangster said, his avaricious eyes gleaming. "I'd have earned it, too. I guess *I'd* take all the risks. And—what'd you do?"

"I'd help you along in every way while you organized the show and keep you posted on developments. There'd be one condition, though—I'd deal with you only; and you'd have to keep my name out of it."

Greasy nodded.

"Yep, I see your point. 'Twouldn't do for a Canadian M. P. to be mixed up in it," he grinned. "Of course, it's a long chance. S'pose the yallah-legs got wind o' it? Or s'pose, if we did pull it off, they sent soldiers from Canada to smash us? Eh? What then?"

"They won't. And if they did, you'd know about it long before. Then you could take your pickings and 'git.'"

"Give us the idea again—and give it slow."

Welland complied.

"Here's the general scheme—details to be arranged later: You'll send people into Black Elk—people the Police don't suspect—to stir up trouble along the creeks; not to preach violence, mind you, nor yet preach *anything* openly, but just to get the boys ready. At the same time you'll organize your gunmen here. When the time comes, you and your men get into Black Elk, finish preparing the boys, and then get 'em all together, on the quiet, and throw down your cards. Then, if the Police won't give in, you smash 'em and run the country. If they do give in, you run things to suit yourselves, just the same. Then you get your pickings and clear out. While you're getting your pickings, you get the U. S. Government to promise to annex the Territory. See? That'll keep the Canadian Government quiet and you'll be a hero in the little old U. S."

"What if they don't promise?"

"They'll promise, all right. Anyway, even if they don't, you can tell the boys they have and that'll give 'em all the heart they want."

Greasy pondered again.

"Say, it sounds a fine idea," he admitted at last.

"It is a fine idea!" Welland was quick to press the opening. "Why, it'll be a cinch for you. And you'll get real pickings. A thousand times what you can make by robbery here and not a tenth the risk. Sooner or later, you'll get yours if you stick at this game, whereas if you do what I suggest you'll be able to drop it and live like a king."

"That's so," the gangster agreed. "Now—we might as well talk the thing out, while we're at it—s'pose this thing falls through, in the end. What do I get for my trouble?"

Welland smiled, as though expecting the question.

"There's always that possibility. And, naturally, it wouldn't be fair to you to have a lot of work wasted. Remember my mentioning that I'd some good claims on Discovery? Well, I'll guarantee delivery to you of so much in dust and nuggets every month till the show's ready. That'll pay you for your trouble, won't it? I can do it on the Q. T. and no one the wiser."

"Now you're sayin' something!" declared the gunman. "Wait, now. S'pose I agrees—and me an' my gang works this thing up and pulls it off. Where do *you* come in? What makes a man like you play with fire like this?"

"I told you, I want to see justice done. Isn't that good enough?"

"No, it ain't."

"Well, it's true."

"Say, come off. This thing's got to be on the square between you an' me or it won't go at all. What's the game?"

"That's true, I tell you," Welland persisted. "Of course, I'd expect my share of the pickings. Isn't *that* good enough?"

"Your share—*that's* more like it. Now we know!" the gangster grinned ironically.

"Your answer?"

Again the gangster became cautious.

"I'll have to put it to my bunch—just a few—my 'trusty lieutenants,' " he said. "They'll be the bed-rock o' the whole show, y'see, if it comes off at all."

"All right. There's no hurry," Welland declared. "I'll

wait for your answer if you can give it inside twenty-four hours."

"That's all right. I'll do it."

"Good. Remember—no mentioning my name."

"Trust me. I'll be mum as a clam."

Both men were silent. Then, suddenly, the gangster spoke again.

"Say, that's a great idea!" he exclaimed. "You're a real smart kid."

Then, before Welland could move an eye, his two revolvers were on the table, covering the politician.

"You see these guns?" he hissed; and his face was devilish. "They'll pump you full o' lead from head to heel if you're tryin' a double-cross on me. Get me?"

"A double-cross?" asked Welland, with no sign of alarm. "Why should I double-cross you?"

"That's neither here nor there. Just you mark what I said, that's all."

"And in return," said Welland slowly and distinctly, "you'll just remember this: if you give me away to a living soul, by so much as a word, I'll see you cut to pieces. I know just how to get you. And I *can* get you when I please."

Greasy's eyelids flickered. This man was of a type which was strange to him—one with whom it was not safe to trifle. He *might* have the power to do as he said. Smiling, he put up his weapons and rose from the table.

"Well, I guess we understand each other, Molyneux. There won't be no double-crossin', here *or* here. We're pardners, on the square—an' no questions ast. Correct?"

"Correct," said Welland.

"Then shake."

They shook.

"All serene," declared Greasy, this little ceremony over. "Then tomorrow, here, at eleven, if that suits you, I'll let you know whether you can count me in on the—say, what'll we call this thing, anyway?"

Welland smiled.

"The republic," he suggested.

The gangster grinned back.

"That's it—whether you can count me in on the republic."

And they parted.

As the gunman went down the stairs, a man waiting at the foot shrank into a corner to escape his observation. Greasy passed out without seeing him, and the man resumed his post at the foot of the stairs, his eyes on the door of the room where Welland still sat.

II

Six men sat 'round a table in a private room of the *Eagle* dance-hall, one of Prospect's leading places of entertainment. The door was locked on the inside. Through the flimsy walls the blare of a brass band, shouts, shrieks and laughter rolled into the room from below, and an occasional outburst of firing told of gentlemen exchanging compliments in the street outside.

At the head of the table Greasy Jones presided. His companions were his 'trusty lieutenants,' the leading members of his gang.

The prisons of all ages, the literature of all countries, might be raked through and through without producing a choicer set of villains.

On Mr. Jones' right sat No-nose Joe. As his nickname indicated, the most prominent feature of his face was absent, having been either shot or knocked off. Its absence added a final grand touch of ferocity to an already hideous, unshaven face equipped with piglike eyes. Joe was built on a burly scale and was noted for deeds, not words.

Next to Joe sat Pete, a haggard youth, pale, clean-shaven, sleepy-eyed, but cunning, quick and nervous in all his movements, like a rat.

Monsieur Philibert was at the foot of the table. Philibert's hair, what there was of it, was black, streaked with grey. His straggly beard was also grey, embellished by tobacco juice. He had bright, enquiring brown eyes and hairy hands, like an ape's. Apart from a generous sprinkling of blood-

curdling adjectives, occasionally applied, his English was perfect.

The fourth man, Sure-thing Kelly, was plump, ruddy and innocent-looking. As a smiling grocer, he would have been perfect. Actually, he was perfect as a smiling butcher—pistols his tools.

Spanish Alphonze brought up the rear—a sturdily built fellow, with slanting eyes, thin, black, drooping moustache, hair on end, skin the colour of a dried fig. A lady of Seville had decorated him in youth with a livid scar stretching from ear to chin. This made him interesting.

The entire party were heavily armed after the fashion of their master, Greasy Jones, who was quite evidently the brains of the gathering.

Having explained Welland's scheme in his own vivid style, Greasy proceeded to put the finishing touches to his discourse by answering the questions of his interested followers.

"We are to smuggle our men in slowly, so as to have as many as possible over there before the show-down?" The query was Philibert's. "And we go in last to take charge—chiefly because we don't want to risk being landed by the Police before it's strictly necessary?"

"Got it dead right," grinned Greasy.

"And the arms—for the boys already in Black Elk—the boys that need 'em—that we can trust? I suppose we smuggle the arms across as well?"

"Right once more. Your head's screwed on as it should be, Philibert!"

"How're we goin' to stir the boys up?" asked Pete.

"Well, o' course we'll do it secret—an' all constitootunal! My friend, the nameless friend, as I told you before, he says they think the laws is wrong an' should be made by the men in Black Elk, an' that Might makes Right in a new country. This partic'lar crowd over there thinks so, I mean. Well, we must encourage 'em in that—on the Q. T. Tell 'em, quiet, that if force is required, force should be used. Then we provides 'em that ain't got it with the force necessary. 'But,' we says, 'we won't use no force if it ain't required. Oh, no. That'd put us in bad everywhere!' See?

Then we tells 'em, 'Look who you've got behind you. The best men on the continent's behind you'—meanin' you an' me, boys—'an' when the time comes, they'll lead you on to vict'ry. But just now it's a secret. See?' An'—more 'n' that!—we'll tell 'em this: 'The Gov'nment o' the U-nited States is behind you! An', with the U-nited States behind you, you can do as you damn well please!' That's what we'll say—later on, when the time's ripe. That'll put guts in 'em. That'll get the Yankee patriots in Black Elk as nothin' else can!"

"Say, you're a ruddy genius, Cap," asserted Sure-thing Kelly. "But say—is the U. S. really goin' to back us up?"

Greasy looked all 'round the table with great effect before replying. Then, leaning over, he whispered, smiling:

"That *is* a fact, boys. I've got it on good authority from that nameless gent that the li'l old U. S. will see us through."

"Well, say!" exclaimed the listeners, with shining eyes. If anything could completely win them over to the plot, it was this promise of support from a great power—gratuitously given by Greasy Jones on a hint from Welland. This promise, with its assurance that the great United States would save their coward hides if anything, by the slightest chance, went wrong, was a trump card. And Greasy knew it well.

"Is that all clear now? We run the show from here—send our boys over by ones and twos—go over ourselves when ready—take charge—down the yallah-legs—set ourselves up in full command—strip the country—and clear out. Get me?"

"You bet!" said the trusty lieutenants. "We're in this thing up to the neck!"

"Stop a minute!" The keenly perceptive Philibert had one more question to ask. "Who is to do the 'stirring up,' Captain? You'll not want any of us to put our heads in the lion's mouth, I hope?"

"No," replied Greasy. "We'll choose some respectables with the gift o' gab from among us here in Prospect—pay 'em well—oh, yes, we'll have to pay 'em—an' send 'em over to do the talkin' for us. If they're caught, that's their look-

out. But they won't be caught. This thing's a dead secret from first to last. Understand that, boys—every man keeps his mouth shut. Before God, if there's a squealer, he'll get his from me!"

His lieutenants knew he would keep his word. There would therefore be no squealing.

"Well, boss, what do we do first?" asked Sure-thing Kelly.

"Nothin' just now—not a word—not a thing—till I say so. I just wanted to get you all in on this tonight. Now, fill the glasses, Pete, an' I'll give you something to drink to. Here y'are, boys"—the gangster rose to his feet, smiling benevolently. "To the finish o' the yallah-legs; an' success to the Black Elk Republic!"

"The Black Elk Republic!"

They drank. Just as he set down his glass Greasy Jones whipped out his revolvers and blazed a volley into the door. The startled men sprang up. Philbert had the door open in an instant.

"Boys, there was someone listenin' outside!" exclaimed the gangster, his cruel face twitching. "By God, I'll kill the man that runs this joint!"

But in the passage there was nothing.

III

When Welland, his business in Prospect transacted, returned to Discovery, he did not know that two pairs of eyes held him under close observation throughout the journey.

In telling Greasy Jones that he had come to Prospect to recover a shipment of goods, the politician had spoken the truth. Having received word of the gangster's successful parley with his lieutenants, Welland traced the goods and hired a packer with two ponies and a partner to carry them through Hopeful Pass to Nugget and there transfer them to the side-wheeler *Black Elk Belle*, the packer's partner remaining with Welland to see them safely to Discovery, while the packer himself returned with his ponies to Prospect.

To the packer's partner aforesaid belonged one of the two pairs of eyes which kept watch on Welland.

The second pair did duty in the head of a quiet, unobtrusive little miner supposed to be on his way from Prospect to a claim on Discovery Creek.

Of the packer's partner and his watch, the little miner knew nothing. Of the miner and his watch, the packer's partner knew nothing. They worked independently.

On arrival at Discovery, the packer's partner saw the goods safely home. There the Rev. Mr. Northcote welcomed Welland warmly. The Rev., like a true Crusader, believed in fighting his battles in the vanguard, where blows fell thickest and courage was an asset; wherefore he had always been a pioneer and was now in Black Elk Territory, youngest and wildest of Canadian communities. When Mr. Molyneux tired of hotel life in Discovery City, the Rev., swallowing his dislikes and prejudices, had offered the politician half his kingdom, a little shanty not far from barracks. Welland had accepted. Necessity and pioneering make strange bed-fellows.

The question of a job for the packer's partner—who had decided to quit at Discovery—came up at that moment. Welland had promised to help him. The Rev. Mr. Northcote needed a general factotum. The packer's partner had many qualifications. Thenceforth he became Lord Chamberlain to Mr. Northcote and assumed the name of Charlie. That night Charlie wrote a short note and posted it at the barracks. It was addressed to the packer in Prospect. But it was intended for Mr. Greasy Jones.

"Will watch him all right," said the note. "Have a job here that suits it fine."

Mr. Greasy was running no risks of a double-cross!

And the unassuming miner?—went straight from the wharf at Discovery to—Police headquarters.

Ten days later he met with a stray bullet—a real stray, intended for someone else—fired by a member of Greasy's gang in Prospect. A good Samaritan rifled his pockets and buried him.

Chapter III

I

Men of all nationalities, and of all professions, honesty of purpose their only common bond, made the Superintendent's quarters at Discovery their nightly rendezvous. The Superintendent's great personality drew them. Coming to his office for assistance or advice—as they did, in dozens, during the day—they were glad to accept his invitation to visit him 'off duty.'

At eleven o'clock one night a representative gathering of this kind held crowded converse round his chair. Lancaster, the Lieutenant-Governor, headed the scale. Forshaw, transferred from Broncho with Hector and still his Adjutant, sat on the Lieutenant-Governor's right. Cranbrook, on a flying visit from Nugget, was also present. Inspector Gemmell, a good-looking, curly-headed youngster of two or three years' service, maintained discreet silence in the background. Medicine was typified by Doctor Quick, Commissioner of Public Health for Black Elk Territory. The Rev. Mr. Northcote stood very well for Religion and Mr. Steven Molyneux for Politics, or Statesmanship. There were also in attendance a few nondescripts, good men and true but of no particular account.

The talk, from frivolities, had settled into serious channels.

"More claim-jumping on Lake Miner, I hear, Major," said the Rev. Mr. Northcote.

"Yes, I believe there was an attempt at it," Hector answered. "But the detachment there has handled it satisfactorily."

"There's an ugly crowd up there," asserted Molyneux.

"There are ugly crowds," said the Lieutenant-Governor, "in all parts of Black Elk Territory. Major Adair sentenced forty men today."

"He'll sentence lots more if this trouble goes on," suggested the politician.

"I don't anticipate it," Hector answered.

"You don't!" Molyneux looked moderately surprised. "But—consider it: This claim-jumping at Lake Miner—this unrest on the creeks——"

"Yes," said one of the nondescripts, a German, "der unrest on der creeks! Growls about der royalty on der gold ad Bioneer Lake! Intimerdation hof der regorder ad Lucky! Der meeting of brodest at Nugget! D'reats hof violence on Discovery idself! Vat do you make of dat, Major Adair?"

"Nothing to be alarmed at," Hector declared.

"You don't think it's—" the Rev. began.

"The rumblings of a volcano?" Molyneux finished.

"No, I don't," said Hector.

"Phew! I'm glad to hear it," said an American nondescript. "It looks just a little suspicious. But *you* ought to know."

"Yes, I should," Hector smiled. "And I do."

The talk swung to other matters. But the American nondescript was not really satisfied. Presently he returned to the subject.

"Say, Major—frankly—we're all friends here, and trustworthy—won't you say—unofficially—what you *really* think? Surely there *is* trouble of some sort in the wind?"

"I've told you precisely the truth," Hector answered steadily. "I don't believe there's anything to fear. There may be trouble—but we can handle it."

"You can?"

Molyneux, still smiling, asked the question.

"Absolutely."

"You've only d'o hundred men here, Major, and dare are dousands hof tough nuts in der Territory," said the German.

"Never mind." Hector was very sure of himself. "They'll listen to reason, if handled properly. If they won't, there are plenty of stout-hearted, law-abiding citizens here to help us."

"Well said, sir!"

The Rev. most heartily approved.

"Supposing there *was* trouble, Major," persisted the politician, "in confidence—as our friend said, we're all reliable fellows here—just how *would* you handle it?"

Again his guests looked intently at the Superintendent. But Molyneux searched Hector's face in vain for the sign he sought.

"I'd appeal to reason first; then, if necessary, to force. In employing force, I'd rely exclusively on my own men. I wouldn't use any other weapon except as a last resort."

"Being confident," said the American, "that you could get along with your two hundred?"

"Being confident—whatever happened," replied Hector, "that I could get along with my two hundred."

"The fool!" thought the politician.

Thinking of Greasy Jones and the plot they were concocting, he hugged himself inside.

II

One fine midsummer morning there came to the barrack gate a boisterous, turbulent crowd. The sentry called out the guard. The noise penetrated to Hector's sanctum—a most unwonted noise——

"Sergeant-Major"—he motioned to Bland, transferred from Broncho to Black Elk Territory at Hector's request—"find out the meaning of this disturbance, please."

The Sergeant-Major hastened out, visions of riots in his head. When he reached the gate, however, he found that the crowd had good-humouredly fallen back, leaving the person on whom their attention centred to pass through the line of Police undisturbed.

"Well, what was it?"

Without looking up from his writing, Hector flung the question at the Sergeant-Major as that worthy N. C. O. returned.

Bland thanked Heaven for the Superintendent's preoccupation.

"It's—it's—" he began.

"It's Constable Oswald," said an alluring voice, "and he's brought you a prisoner."

Hector looked up to see before him: *One*, the Rev. Mr. Northcote, on the broad grin, held captive by *two*, a buck policeman, standing at attention.

"What does this mean?"

Hector's tone was icy.

He never permitted liberties. It seemed that this was one; for Constable Oswald was—a woman, in the complete uniform, scarlet coat and all, of a member of the Force!

"Come along, what's the meaning of this?" demanded Hector again, though the sternness was gone from his voice and there was a twinkle in his eye.

Constable Oswald burst out laughing. Northcote lifted up his voice and bellowed. Bland went into a corner and shook. After that, Hector could contain himself no longer. The office rang with mirth.

"How dare you come in here like this—and play such tricks on me? Northcote, I insist on an explanation," Hector said, as soon as he could get his breath back.

"Major Adair, I'll explain," the lady declared. She was still laughing. "The fact of the matter is—I was in a boat—coming down the Black Elk this morning—when she upset. My valise was lost and—well, the corporal in charge of the nearest post came to the rescue and put the wardrobe of the post at my disposal. Not wishing to elevate myself too highly, I chose a constable's outfit. Honestly, it was all there was! Will you forgive me?"

"It's a misuse of the Queen's uniform, of course, Miss——"

"Oswald——"

"Miss Oswald—but—well, you plead so nicely and the circumstances are extenuating, so we'll let you off this time. And Mr. Northcote must see you properly provided for. By the way, were you the cause of the excitement outside?"

"Yes." Her eyes beamed laughter. "I think a woman constable is a new thing in Discovery."

It was. Nothing like it had been seen in the Territory before, nor was ever seen again. Miss Oswald's entrance,

like everything else with which she was connected, was original and exclusive.

"And now—what I really came here for," she went on, quite at home in her strange environment and attire, "was to state my business. I'm a woman reporter and I've come up here for the *Montreal Comet* to write up the Black Elk country."

"You're plucky. This is a dangerous part of the world."

"Oh, I love excitement and danger." This was obviously true. "Besides, I——"

"Excuse me—but—" some far depth in Hector's memory had been sounded—"didn't you come up to Regina with the Press Association in——?"

"Yes!" cried Nita Oswald delightedly. "I *told* Mr. Northcote you'd remember me—and my bustle!"

A stout-hearted, unfailing friend, a credit to journalism, this energetic woman was to prove herself.

III

That was a busy and momentous day for Hector. The door had barely closed on Nita Oswald when he found himself in conference with the Lieutenant-Governor.

"Have you heard anything"—Lancaster was very thoughtful—"that would lead you to suspect our administration of—well, graft, Adair?"

"Graft, sir?"

"Yes, graft—and double dealings—and rottenness——"

"Nothing definite."

"Humph! Well, we've got it, just the same. I've positive evidence, unfortunately, that some of the recorders have been accepting bribes. At Pioneer Lake, for instance, the recorder falsified his books to show that a certain party had staked a certain claim before it was taken up by another man. Some technicality or other bore favourable witness to the falsehood. Shortly afterwards, when the rightful owner had been ousted, the recorder became suddenly rich. He was suspected and—well, anyhow, the whole story is now in my hands."

"Bad business!"

"Yes. But it doesn't stop there. I've learned of similar things at Nugget and on Discovery. At present, I don't know a man in the whole Department whom I can absolutely trust."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I can only warn them and watch them. Fire the lot? Where could I replace them? And the new set would be as bad as the old."

"If there's anything I can do, sir——"

"You can do a great deal, Adair. Put your men on the alert for anything suspicious. Help me—and get them to help me—in this fight for clean administration. You can do that."

"I will, sir."

"Good. We'll clear up the mess by degrees. And we'll make a strong team. Now, I'd like to know, confidentially, has anything of the sort come to your notice? Have any of your men——?"

"Been offered bribes, sir?" The Superintendent stiffened. "I've heard of none. No-one would dare to attempt to bribe them! And they wouldn't take one—not a man of them."

"You've heard of none, then? But you wouldn't—if it was accepted."

"Wouldn't I? You don't know my men, sir, as I do."

"Well, if you hear of any such attempt, will you let me know?"

"Yes, sir. But I *won't* hear of any such attempt!"

"How he loves those men, and trusts them!" thought the Lieutenant-Governor, not without envy and admiration.

"I'll rely on your help?" he said aloud.

"Absolutely."

"Good. That's all—just now."

Hector pondered over Lancaster's report for several hours. Bribery and corruption creeping in—here—there; and he sought for a light in the darkness.

In the afternoon Fate startled him with a piece of news directly and unpleasantly bearing on the conversation of the

morning—Fate assuming the form and personality of Inspector Gemmell and of Sergeant (ex-Lieut. Col.) Kellett, who came into the office to see him.

A curious pair they made, Kellett and Gemmell—the grey-headed Sergeant, with his breast of ribbons, taking orders from the boy, who might, under other circumstances, have passed for his son or the junior subaltern of his regiment.

“Well?”

The stern ejaculation jerked Gemmell into action.

“I’ve brought Sergeant Kellett in to report an experience he had yesterday, sir,” said the curly-headed Inspector. “I thought it better you should hear it, sir, from him direct.”

“All right, Kellett—your story.”

“Sir,” said Kellett, “yesterday, when collecting royalties, I was offered a bribe.”

Hector’s mind flashed back to his conversation with Lancaster. A bribe!

“The man was a Swede, Hendrick Olson, working a group of claims on Lake Fortune and another on Discovery. He handed me a large poke and told me there was more where that came from if I would not ask him to pay the royalty, or words to that effect.”

“And you——?”

The Superintendent looked anxious.

“I gave it back to him, sir. Then I knocked him down.”

A little of the severity in the C. O.’s thoughtful face relaxed.

“Go on.”

“Then I gave him a good round talking to, sir. I told him that his was a criminal offense. I tried to make him understand what the Force represents and maintains, sir. Finally, I told him that the surest way for him to damn himself in our eyes was to play the crooked game. I think he grasped it all, sir, in the end.”

Here was a man with the honour of the Force at heart—a man long trained in true *esprit de corps*—with real knowledge of and sympathy for his chief. Not for nothing had Sergeant Kellett commanded his own regiment in his time!

“Thank you, Kellett. Report any further affairs of this

kind that come to your notice, will you? You did the right thing, Mr. Gemmell. That will do."

The Superintendent shook hands with them both; and in that moment there were between them no distinctions of rank. They were simply comrades-in-arms, united in their jealous love of the corps they served.

Forshaw came in a few minutes after the others had gone. He looked serious when Hector told him what had happened.

"What do you propose to do, sir?" he enquired.

"With the men? Nothing," answered Hector. "Only—trust them."

Later, when he saw the Lieutenant-Governor again, the latter asked him a little banteringly:

"Aren't you alarmed—in case your Department should fall from its high estate, as the recorders have done?"

"No, I'm not," he replied.

Then, on the same day, came to hand two reports, one from Dunsmuir at Hopeful Pass, forwarded through Cranbrook, the other from Cranbrook himself, returned to his station at Nugget, both bearing much on the situation developing in the Territory.

Hector read the first report:

'Nugget City, B. E. T., Today's Date.

'Officer Commanding, N. W. M. P.,

'Black Elk Territory.

'SIR: I have the honour to report that at 3 p. m. yesterday it was reported that word was being circulated through the camps on Upper Nugget for a secret meeting of certain miners to be held in *O'Brien's Place*, a Nugget City dance-hall, before opening time, i. e., 7 p. m., that day. I considered it better to permit the meeting to be held but to attend same myself in order to ascertain what occurred. I therefore caused it to be circulated throughout Nugget that I would be out of town when the meeting took place. I then secured admission to *O'Brien's Place* undetected and secreted myself. Before the meeting the hall was searched, but I was not discovered. Sentries were also posted, but in an unobtrusive way, nor were the doors or windows locked, the

object being, in my opinion, to deceive us if we interrupted the meeting and cause us to believe that those in attendance had nothing to conceal.

'At 6.30 p. m. the meeting was declared open. The chair was taken by Ginger Yates, whom I have had under suspicion for some time but against whom I have been unable to obtain evidence. There were also on the platform three miners from this district. About seventy-five men occupied the auditorium. I could not recognize many of them nor was I able to identify those joining in the subsequent discussion, as my hiding-place did not afford a good view of the hall, but the majority must have been men from this district. The names of those recognised and in any way concerned with the meeting are given in attached appendix.

'The meeting was addressed by a man unknown to me. He is a newcomer to Nugget and may have come in from the outside.

'The chairman introduced the stranger as 'a friend of all miners and especially of those who had led the rush into the country after the big strike.' The unknown man then spoke for a period of fifteen minutes. I could not record his remarks in full but, in general, they were directed against the administration of this Territory. The speaker said there were far too many people in the country now and, in his opinion, the Government should have held at the border all those attempting to enter after the first big rush went through. (Cheers.) In his opinion, the first comers had a right to all the wealth of the country, but that men who came in later had struck it rich before them and had been permitted by the administration to carry off what really did not belong to them under the noses of the old-timers, many of whom, like themselves, had been thus compelled to shift to poorer fields, there being no room for them along Discovery Creek. He also stated that the laws governing Black Elk Territory should be made by the miners, *irrespective of nationality*, and not at Ottawa. (Cheers.)

'The speaker then repeatedly cautioned his hearers against reading his remarks as an incitation to violence. He did not advocate violence. But he thought they should respectfully

petition the Government to allow them to make their own laws. And one of the first laws should compel all late-comers to hand over their claims to those who entered Black Elk before them.

'The speaker then said that the meeting was not secret, in the strictest sense, but had been called quietly together so that it might not be interrupted by non-sympathizers. The same consideration had induced him to select for an audience those known by Mr. Yates to hold his own views. It would, at the same time, be necessary to organize quietly, lest their purpose be misconstrued and their prospects wrecked.

'He then sat down, amid applause.

'The speaker was evidently a man of some education and talent. He spoke excellent English and was apparently not of the criminal class.

'The chairman calling for the audience to state their views, several members rose in support of the speaker's remarks. Two were especially extreme, abusing the Premier, the Lieutenant-Governor, the Mounted Police and yourself, and favouring violence to gain their ends. Yates suppressed these remarks. Others, whom I judged to be foreigners, insisted in demanding that the privileges of British subjects be extended to all resident in the Territory. I gathered that the audience was of a low moral character and somewhat hostile to the Force.

'A resolution was then passed, sympathizing with the speaker's stand and pledging all present to work quietly towards awakening the first-comers to 'a proper appreciation of their grievances.'

'I am having search made with a view to discovering the whereabouts and identity of the man who addressed the meeting and am also keeping O'Brien, the proprietor of the hall, and Ginger Yates, the chairman, under observation.

'I have the honour to be, sir,'

And so to Cranbrook's flourishing signature and a conclusion.

Forshaw watched his chief's face closely as he perused this report, but could read nothing there.

"What d'you think of it, sir?" he asked.

"My only wonder, Forshaw," answered the Superintendent, "is that we've not had similar reports before!"

"Then this one from Corporal Dunsmuir won't surprise you, either."

And the little man laid the following before him:

'Hopeful Pass Detachment, B. E. T.,
'Today's Date.

'Officer Commanding, N. W. M. P.,
'Nugget City.

'SIR: I have the honour to report that I discovered concealed in the outfit of a negro giving the name of Rastus Lafayette Washington Green, who endeavoured to pass customs today, these weapons: 6 revolvers, of various makes, all modern; 1 Winchester rifle; 2 Snider carbines; also 100 rounds assorted revolver ammunition. I confiscated same and am detaining Green pending instructions from you.

'This man has made frequent trips from Prospect to Discovery, but no arms have been discovered on him, though his outfit, clothing, etc., have always been closely searched.

'I have the honour to be, sir,'

And so to Dunsmuir's scrawling signature and a conclusion.

The Lieutenant-Governor's report, Kellett's report, Cranbrook's, Dunsmuir's—and still he searched for light in the darkness.

IV

Three weeks later the Lieutenant-Governor came again to Hector with a long catalogue of crookedness recently detected.

"It's too bad," Hector sympathized, when Lancaster had finished. "The temptations in this Territory are tremendous."

"Yes. But that doesn't matter. And this fellow Molyneux——"

"What about him?" asked Hector quickly.

"I don't like his presence here, Adair. He says nothing, does nothing. But suppose he carries word of all this back to Ottawa before I clean it up. That will mean ruin—to me."

"I hope not, sir."

"I'm afraid so." The Lieutenant-Governor passed a hand over his tired eyes. "Yet I'm doing my best. I couldn't fight Molyneux, though, on his own ground. And the public would suspect me of being personally implicated in this graft. They always do suspect the men on top. Yes, it will mean my finish."

"I think you'd get plenty of support from the men who know you."

"Perhaps. But could they fight Molyneux's money? And the man's been acquiring claims right and left! You know that, don't you?"

"I know it, yes."

"By the way, have your men reported anything further?"

"Bribery? Yes; several more attempts. I don't like it, sir. It's unfair to a man to try him with such temptations. Even a small bribe looks worth while to a man drawing fifty cents a day. But I'm sure the boys will pull through with flying colours."

"They'll need to. The feeling along the creeks is rising. The miners are very many; the servants of the Government very few."

When the Lieutenant-Governor was gone, Hector sat down to think. He fully grasped the significance of the corruption which the Lieutenant-Governor was fighting. Molyneux must know of it, since it was known to many of the miners. And if Molyneux did not use it as a weapon on returning to Ottawa, the miners were almost certain to raise a storm about it. The community of Black Elk was like a spirited horse, fretting against the curb. Every bribe accepted by a Government official, be he only an insignificant clerk, was a stroke from the whip. 'The miners are very many; the servants of the Government very few.' This statement showed the fear haunting the Lieutenant-Governor—the fear of serious trouble, of indignant protest by the

miners against this maladministration. If trouble came, the position of the minority would be very uncomfortable. All in all, Lancaster's anxiety was not surprising.

The situation being what it was, the necessity of maintaining the integrity of his own command untarnished was greater, if possible, than ever. In view of the temptation, and of the delicate situation, perhaps a little encouragement from higher up might be a good thing.

"Vickers," he told his clerk, "take this down for circulation to all posts and detachments—to be read by every man in the division——"

Sergeant Kellett, on Discovery Creek, called Constable York's detachment to attention and read them the C. O.'s letter:

'CONFIDENTIAL.

It has been brought to the notice of the Officer Commanding, Black Elk Territory, that members of the Force and others have recently been offered bribes. The Officer Commanding has yet to learn of a bribe being accepted by any member of the Force.

The Officer Commanding recognizes no circumstances justifying any member of the Force in accepting bribes in any shape or form. Recalling the fact from personal experience, he knows of no instance since the Force was organized of any member either seeking or accepting illegitimate remuneration for his services.

All ranks of the Force in Black Elk Territory will remember that the reputation of the North-West Mounted Police is in their hands.'

The Sergeant gravely folded the paper and dismissed the detachment. Whereupon the detachment—total strength, three men—flocked round him and begged to see the letter for themselves.

Followed muttering comment: "'And others'—that's tactful, eh?"—"The O. C. has yet to learn'—there's a touch of brag in that."—"The Officer Commanding recognizes no'—by Jove, I wish he'd spent the winter with me in Hopeful Pass!"—"You fool, he went through worse before you were

born!"—"Recalling the fact from personal experience"—that's right! The Old Man came out with the Originals!"—"All ranks will remember that the reputation—.' Good old 'Spirit-of-Iron'!"

"Yes," said Sergeant Kellett, forcibly annexing the letter, "it's in their hands! And, before the Lord, you, York, or any man Jack of you, if you forget it, I'll take down my stripes and lick the stuffing out of you!"

"Thanks!" the red-readed York flashed back hotly. "Think *I'd* go back on the Chief? You just hint that I'd forget it, Sergeant Kellett, an' I'll knock your block off, stripes an' all!"

"Right-o!" replied the Sergeant, grown strangely husky. "Keep your hair on, carrots! We'll let that sentiment stand for the whole Force, if you please."

And stand for the Force it did.

v

Miss Nita Oswald, when she first came to the North, had ignored Prospect as a field for 'copy.' Discovery City lured her. But closer acquaintance had shown her that Black Elk Territory was almost too law-abiding to be picturesque. Her Editors were clamouring for 'thrills' and 'ginger.' Her friends advised her to seek them in Prospect. Mr. Northcote thought that Prospect was no place for a lady. But Miss Oswald's thirst for sensation ruled her and she insisted on seeing the place for herself.

"Very well," said the Human Parson, "if you *will* go, I'll go with you."

"Chaperone?" Miss Oswald had queried, with a touch of assumed anger. "Think I need one?"

"Chaperone? No! Protector? Yes! Though you mightn't think it, I'm an artist with a six-shooter; and not a bad fist at boxing."

"Come on, then! There's no need to ask you to leave your odour of sanctity behind—you've never had it!"

So they went down into Prospect; and, in due course, sallied out on knowledge bent.

The streets were a blaze of light. Crowds gathered thickly, like blundering, deluded moths, round the glaring entrances of the bigger dance-halls, cafés, saloons, gambling houses, dope dens and theatres. On platforms outside the theatres bands blared murderously and leathern-throated men, standing before posters of scarlet-cheeked women in all stages of dress and undress, bellowed lurid descriptions of the delights they had to offer. From the dance-halls came crashes of music, shouts and shrieks; shouts, jingling of glasses and pistol shots from the saloons. No-one minded them. No-one minded anything—except their own business. When drunken men were flung out of the saloons, when obstreperous plungers, their last dollar gone, were pitched bodily from the gambling houses, no-one raised them from the ground where they lay. Greasy Jones' gang worked openly through the crowd. The men in the ticket-offices sat with revolvers ready to hand. Broken men, shuddering from the effects of cocaine or opium, wandered aimlessly about the dope dens. Innumerable painted ladies cried their wares. There was no peace, no truth, no beauty in Prospect. It was a ghastly hunting-ground of Vice and Death.

The Rev. Mr. Northcote and his companion saw it all.

Towards two a. m., seeking a climax, they visited a theatre, the lowest they could find. Miss Oswald was determined to see it. There were boxes at the sides, benches in the auditorium. The air was grey with smoke, the floor a mass of filth. The packed audience, as Nita Oswald afterwards told the readers of the *Comet*, 'would have made the combined resources of ancient Newgate and modern Sing-Sing look like a Band of Hope meeting.' There was a real stage, with real scenery. A cavern below the footlights accommodated the orchestra, consisting of a jangling piano and two asthmatic violins. The artists were of two varieties—the has-beens and the never-will-bes. The former depended on charity and their past reputations, the latter on their youth, their looks and their self-confidence, which was unfathomable. There was a bar in one corner, marvellously patronized. Between the acts, the younger actresses, in their airy costumes, ran up to the boxes and beguiled the occupants on

commission into buying cigars at one hundred dollars a box and drinks at ten dollars per. Greasy Jones and his cronies occupied a box and were closely surrounded by be vies of beauty; but he paid for nothing, the proprietor being entirely dependent on his patronage.

As soon as Miss Oswald and the parson were seated, a man in an old dress suit appeared on the stage and announced that one of the actors would deliver an address.

This was a surprise to the audience, 'addresses' being unusual. But it proved even more of a surprise to the Rev. Mr. Northcote and the woman reporter.

The actor, who had previously given a 'black-face' turn, came on in costume, with his cork still on. And he began to speak. He had been drinking.

"Ladies an' Gennelmun: The lady that pre-ceded me sang you a song, the composhision of one of our bri'est local poets, directin' upon that famous force o' sanctimonious red-coats clevehly referred to as 'the yallah-legs,' the well-deserved arrars of wit an' ridicule. Ladies an' Gennelmun, I agree with her (Cheers). You agree with her (Cheers). An' I wanna tell you folks what *I* think should be done to 'em.

"Ladies an' Gennelmun—fellow-citenens—them fellers have kept you an' me out o' Black Elk Terr'ty. Yes, suh, kep' us out' Black Elk Terr'ty. Is tha' right! Is tha' just? (Thunderous cries of 'No!') Cer'nly not! We're en-titled to get in on that gol' up there. An' I say we ought ge' in (Cheers).

"Now, why are'nt we in there? Eh? 'Cause them yallah-legs keep us out. An' why do they keep us out? 'Cause in'str'ns from—from the citenens o' Black Elk? No! From the autocrats that govern Canada (Prolonged booing).

"Now, I advocate that the laws oughta be changed. Yes! Who should gov'n Black Elk Terr'ty? Why, the citenens! If they gov'ned Black Elk, you'd find we'd be there! Yes, suh (Cheers).

"Now, I wan' all you peepul, Ladies an' Gennelmun, to work for tha' change. Mos' of us here tonight, 'll stay here—'cause o' the yallah-legs. But you can work for tha' change jus' the same! An' those on their way in, they can work

for 't, too. An' you can help *fix* the yallah-legs." Here followed two minutes of scathing and heartily applauded abuse of the Mounted Police. The speaker worked himself up to a high pitch of excitement. Then, "I tell you, Ladies an' Gennelmun, I'd like to see a new flag over Black Elk! Yes, I would! Any flag—but the Stars an' Stripes preferred! (Terrific applause from one section of the audience.) I want a change. An' I tell you, suh, confidenshully, there's goin'——!"

Over the hall rang out a man's voice, commanding, terrible:

"Stop!"

All eyes turned to Greasy Jones' box. The actor hesitated in bewildered fashion, then, evidently deciding that the interruption was not seriously meant, went on:

"I tell you, there's going to be a change. We'll dash the yallah-legs——"

"Stop!"

"Heavens! I'm glad we came in," whispered Nita Oswald. "This is going to be exciting. Is the terrible Greasy Jones a British patriot, after all?"

"He's no patriot," the clergyman whispered back. "Keep still."

Again the actor looked up at the box. Greasy Jones, his ladies having fallen back, was clearly visible, his fierce eyes fixed on the wretched speaker.

"Isn't tha' what you——?" whispered the actor.

The answer was a pistol-shot, smashing the hush. Greasy Jones, his face livid with rage, had fired. The actor pitched upon his face, dead.

"Keep your seats, everyone!" ordered Greasy, peering with his hawk face over the audience. "Manager, take that man away. And get on with the show!"

The audience was stunned into obedience. The manager followed the gangster's instructions without a word. A raucous-voiced actress tripped onto the stage, where the murdered man's blood had left a stain, and relieved the tension with a song and dance. In five minutes the tragedy was

forgotten, the crowd was laughing uproariously and Greasy Jones was toying with his girls.

Northcote's first thought was for Nita.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

But the plucky reporter's nerve, stout as it was, had been unable to stand this shock.

"For God's sake, let's get out of here!" she whispered. "This is terrible!"

Outside, recovered, she asked Northcote what he thought of the occurrence.

"I don't know," he answered. "But, rest assured, I'll see that Adair hears about that speech and Jones' extraordinary behaviour!"

Next day they returned to Discovery.

Chapter IV

I

Dr. Quick, Chairman and Commissioner of the Board of Health for Black Elk Territory, was a man with a wonderful sense of humour. Though plump and rosy, he did not look a jester. His face was always solemn and his twinkling grey eyes were so hidden by his huge round glasses that nothing could be read in them. Taking advantage of these facts, the doctor made his life one round of fun. He was one of the busiest men in Discovery City, working night and day and carrying almost all the burden of his department on his own shoulders; but he still found time for tricks and jokes. The doctor was an inexplicable enigma to those who did not know him. To his friends he was a perpetual delight and one of the cleverest practitioners in North America.

The doctor, being a shrewd man, knew the real thing when he saw it; hence his deep friendship for the Superintendent commanding at Discovery.

One night not long after the Rev. Mr. Northcote's return from Prospect, the doctor lingered on in Hector's quarters till the last of the guests had gone. Then he suddenly said, in his slow, solemn way:

"Adair, I'd a queer experience today—a joke. Last winter, at Nugget there was a fine big Yankee there, dying of pneumonia. Very far gone. I treated him. 'Doctor,' he says, 'if you're going to save me you'll have to be quick.' 'Quick?' said I. 'I'm always Quick!'" (The doctor's favourite pun.) "Well, he pulled through. He was grateful, the poor cuss. Early this evening, Adair, I saw that man again."

"Is that so?"

Hector wondered what was coming.

"Yes. I went into the *Cash-In*—no, not for a drink; to see a fellow lying upstairs with a broken leg, a man who

can't be moved. Afterwards, on my way downstairs, a fearful specimen of human microbe held me up, asked for my money or my life. I've lots of money but only one life. Besides, he had a gun. So I obliged. One of the first hold-ups we've had in Discovery."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Yes. But I don't want him jailed. He's had his punishment. That's the joke. After the gentleman held me up, I returned to the office. When I got there, who should I see but my Yankee friend? Struck it rich this summer and is on his way home. Came in to make me a present of a beautiful nugget, in gratitude. We opened a convivial bottle and I told him my experience. 'Could you point the man out?' he asked. 'Come on, then. I'll get your money back.' 'I don't want the money,' I said. 'And he's armed.' 'Never mind. I want to get your roll for you. Don't worry. I was champion boxer at Yale.' So, to humour him, and expecting a little fun, I took him to the *Cash-In*, a good starting-point for our search. The human microbe was in the bar. Our Yankee friend called him outside—said he wanted to tell him a secret. Secret! Wow!" The doctor chuckled. "He got the human microbe's gun and then pounded him to a jelly. When the massacre was ended, the microbe handed over the roll and departed like a lamb. Strange, eh?"

"Very. But," Hector insisted, "we must take the man."

"Aw, Adair, he's had enough."

"No, he hasn't. Describe him, will you?"

The doctor looked reproachful.

"Adair, if I thought you'd do this I wouldn't have told you the story. But the King must be obeyed. He was a huge, broad-shouldered creature, with a beard and, strange to say, he had no nose. Why, do you know the gentleman?"

"Do I? That's No-nose Joe, one of Greasy Jones' men, I'm certain. Grown a beard, eh? I must see to this."

After a word with Forshaw, Sergeant Savage, at that moment patrolling the streets of Discovery, was sent for. The bulldog Sergeant appearing, he was given a description of the man and told to look for him at the *Cash-In*.

"And be quick!" said Hector.

"You may be quick, but you won't be Quick as I'd be," said the doctor.

"Don't worry, sir, I'll take him myself."

This to the doctor, whose joke had gone completely over the Sergeant's head.

For three-quarters of an hour, Hector and the doctor awaited the Sergeant's return at the office. At two a. m. precisely, enter a tableau:

Two solemn constables, one on each side of a battered wreck in hand-cuffs, like supporters to a battered shield; the wreck, clothes torn, face blue; Sergeant Savage, the bulldog, both eyes blackened, nose swollen, tunic torn up the back and spattered with gore. The Sergeant at his full height did not reach to the sagging shoulder of the wreck.

"Well?" said Hector.

The doctor's eyes twinkled but the Superintendent's were very stern.

The Sergeant saluted with a whisk and a clash of spurred heels.

"Sir——" said the Sergeant, "I proceeded direct to the *Cash-In* saloon; left the patrol outside; spotted the prisoner in a corner, drinking; arrested him. He drew a gun and pointed it at me, contrary to sections 105 and 109 of the Criminal Code. We struggled. Finally, I got the hand-cuffs on him and handed him over to the patrol. I regret to have to report, sir, that the following damage was done to Government and private property——"

Here the bulldog produced his notebook and read:

"'Tunic torn and blood-stained; three chairs smashed; twenty glasses smashed——' that was when we hit the bar, sir—'table smashed; wall bloodstained; panel of door smashed.' That's all, sir."

And the Sergeant closed his notebook and saluted with the utmost gravity.

"Well, it's the microbe, all right," said the doctor.

"Yes, and it's No-nose Joe!" said Hector.

Of himself he asked, "Now, how did *he* get through the pass? And what is he doing here?"

II

The secret service agents of the Police in Black Elk Territory were known only to one man—the Superintendent in command; and the reports they handed in he kept to himself. They came to him for orders, in the middle of the night, unseen by any other living soul. Of their chief's plans, they knew nothing. Each worked independently, without coming into contact with the rest.

One of the most trusted of Hector's agents was Perkins, the gambler of Regina and Qu'appelle, yet a different Perkins, reformed when Hector, returning from Arcady, had told him of his mother's death and shown him whither he was drifting. Perkins now devoted his knowledge of crime to the cause of Justice and was hardier, stronger, cleaner, altogether a better man.

A hint of wintry frost was in the air when Perkins came in one night from Prospect to report.

"Well, Perkins——" this from Hector—"have you watched Greasy Jones?"

"Sure have, sir. First thing, I got a job at the *Joyland*, a Prospect dance-hall. Greasy visits that place pretty frequent. An' I've got thick with him, sir. I always waits on him. He thinks I'm scart o' him, so he sen's for me—enjoys seein' me sweat fear, I guess."

"Good. And?"

"Well, sir, he's been following the usual line o' battle, murder an' sudden death. 'T'other night, sir, he an' his pardners was havin' a drink in a private room. Greasy had a drop on board. He was layin' on hot about the Police, 'cause he said you'd arrested an' put in jug one o' his main pushes—No-nose Joe."

"That's true. He didn't like the idea?"

"He didn't, sir. 'Pears he's scart Joe will let out some plan or other Greasy's got in his head."

"I see. Well, Perkins, No-nose hasn't had a word to say. I've tried everything, bar torture, and he won't open his mouth. I want to learn how he got through the pass and

what he's doing here and in disguise—he's grown a beard, you know. But he won't talk."

"Would you like me to try an' find out from Greasy, sir?"

"Yes, if you can. But I don't want you shot. Last spring one of my best men was shot dead by Greasy's gang a few days after reporting here to me. It *may* have been accidental. Yet he hadn't learned much. He gave me useful information about Greasy but I doubt if it was worth his life."

"I'll be all right, sir. I'll be thick as thieves with Greasy soon. There's another thing you oughta know, sir. There's a lot o' feelin' runnin' against the Force. Shouldn't be surprised if they tries to rush the pass, or somethin'. It's not safe for even six policemen to be seen on the streets in Prospect now, sir—take it from me."

"I know that, Perkins. Any more meetings?"

"No, sir, but the guys at the theatres spout long speals, all sayin' there oughta be a change in Black Elk Territory an' the yallah-legs should be swept away."

"They haven't counseled violence or said anything more about a change actually at hand?"

"Not since Greasy shot that actor 'bout three weeks ago, sir. Strange thing, that!"

"Very. Well, keep your eyes and ears open, Perkins. And stick to Greasy—tight. I may tell you, things are lookin' very serious here. We've had meetings demanding the Lieutenant-Governor's resignation and a clean sweep of everyone in power. They haven't threatened—but the Territory is rising to a turmoil. The other day, though, a miners' meeting at Nugget advised lynching the recorder. Mr. Cranbrook talked them into reason—a fine piece of diplomacy; but it all points to unrest. You report similar troubles from Prospect. Then again, I learn, recently, of several attempts to smuggle in large quantities of arms—started with a big nigger in the late summer—I'm speaking confidentially—and has continued intermittently ever since. It may mean nothing—or a great deal. Now, do all these things connect? And is Greasy in the game? That's what you must find out, Perkins."

"I'll stick to Greasy day an' night, sir."

"Good. And keep me posted. Mum's the word."

"Yes, sir. Good night."

III

Hopeful Pass lay gripped in the first big cold of the northern winter. Every lake, creek and river in Black Elk was frozen over. The miners had deserted their claims for town or retired into their shacks till spring. Travelers in the pass might be counted on one hand. The human tide, like the watery tide, had succumbed to the wintry clutch.

And yet the Mounted Police post was as active as in the days of the rush. Half the men were tramping up and down in the snow. Outside their big fur coats they wore their bandoliers, belts and revolvers, and each man carried his carbine, while young Inspector Gemmell, similarly equipped, was sitting on an open box of ammunition.

They were going to fight? They were—if necessary.

Gemmell, who had relieved Cranbrook at Nugget a short time before, had been advised by headquarters that an attempt might soon be made by the thugs of Prospect to rush the post on Hopeful Pass and gain admittance to the gold-fields. He was to avert this attempt by 'taking such steps as he deemed advisable'—(Let the boy run his own show!) and Gemmell, who included Hopeful Pass in his jurisdiction, had instantly taken long steps—in Hopeful Pass direction, since it was better that he should be on the scene of action himself.

To resist the advance, Gemmell had erected a barrier covering the approach to the post and had maintained a perpetual look-out in the pass a mile or two ahead. This look-out was on duty now.

From Prospect that morning had come word of an advance. Gemmell had thereupon turned out half his men, leaving the rest in comfort in the tent. Gemmell had also a Maxim in the tent but, as it was water-cooled, it was liable to freeze up if left for too long in the open.

If the thugs came up, Gemmell planned to emulate the Spartans of Thermopylæ.

The pass must be held to the last.

He meant to hold it.

Meanwhile, he wished the thugs would 'get it over,' as he was sure his nose was freezing.

Gemmell's scouts suddenly appeared over the skyline a hundred yards away.

"Gang of two hundred, heavily armed, just come into sight, sir," the scouts reported on arrival.

"All right," said Gemmell. Then, to the men in the tent, "Turn out, you fellows!"

The fellows turned out. Gemmell mounted the Maxim in a conspicuous position, pointing down the pass. He stationed his reserve behind the barrier. The remainder of the men, six all told, he drew up in a line, across the pass.

Then, in a mist of descending flakes, they waited.

"If you'll pardon me, sir,"—Sergeant Kellett tactfully placed his superior knowledge and experience at his C. O.'s disposal—"I'd parley with them first."

"Yes, Sergeant," said Gemmell.

He wished his moustache was bigger.

An hour passed.

"Are you sure they're coming?" Gemmell asked the scouts.

A sudden roar, borne on the wind, supplied the answer and a crowd of men surged over the crest below.

All alone, Gemmell advanced to meet the crowd on the boundary-line, a stone's throw in front.

Two hundred?—a low estimate. There were at least three hundred in the crowd—ruffians all, and well armed, the dregs of Prospect, the toughest town on earth. Gemmell looked for Greasy Jones or his gang but saw none of them.

The crowd yelled with mingled passion and triumph when it saw Gemmell. He slung his carbine easily over his shoulder and unbuttoned the holster of his revolver. On the boundary-line he met the mob, face to face.

"Out o' the way!" roared the crowd—and halted.

"Sorry, but this is the boundary," replied Gemmell coolly.

He was forced to raise his voice. "Behind me is Canadian territory. You can't pass!"

These remarks produced a storm of hoots, laughs and jeers. The crowd began to advance again, intending to sweep Gemmell aside.

On the very edge of Canadian territory the crowd halted again, checked by their leader, a desperate-looking villain, who waved significantly toward the line of Police.

"Well, what you got to say?"

Turning, when the mob had halted and had fallen into silence, the leader challenged Gemmell.

"My orders," shouted Gemmell, in return, "are to halt you at the boundary. I have a big force of men, and a Maxim gun, that could clean up this pass in half a minute. Now, I don't want trouble. I want you fellows to have some sense and go home."

The leader of the mob placed himself in front of Gemmell, feet wide apart, hands on hips, and looked him up and down. "Say, kid," he demanded, "who th' hell d'you think you are? Who told you to stop us law-abidin' citizens?"

"Her Majesty the Queen!" said Gemmell.

"Whoop!" shouted the man; and the crowd jeered.

"What th' hell right has Her Majesty got in Black Elk, anyhow?" went on the leader. "The Black Elk miners is the boys to run that country. An' they want us in. An' we're goin' in! See?"

He thrust his lowering face to within an inch of the Inspector's.

"Get your men an' your pop-gun out o' th' way!" the thug continued. "An' no one'll be hurt! Out o' th' way, you——!"

And he put out his hand to thrust Gemmell aside.

"Hard words!" smiled the Inspector.

Then he flicked the man across the mouth.

A shriek of anger rose from the crowd. The leader, his face crimson, whipped out a revolver and pointed it at Gemmell.

"Out o' th' way!" he roared.

"We're on Canadian soil. You've broken the law!"

With that, the Inspector dashed the thug's weapon aside and closed with him.

Sergeant Kellett, waiting with the line behind, saw the youngster struggling furiously, in a turmoil of snow, and the mob closing. Instantly, he doubled his men forward. A row of levelled carbines came suddenly to Gemmell's rescue.

"Stand back, you!" ordered Kellett hotly. "Or I'll open fire!" A roaring mass, the toughs swayed to and fro before that slender barrier. Between them, as on common ground, Gemmell and his antagonist rolled and struggled.

Sergeant Kellett whipped out his handcuffs, watching his chance to plunge into the fight.

But out of the scurry of snow came Gemmell, at that instant—smiling and on top! His face was lacerated, the tough kicking and clawing like a mad dog. Gemmell had pitched the revolver out of reach in the first struggle.

"Leave him, Sergeant!" he implored. "He's my meat!"

Then—click!—pulling a pair of hand-cuffs from his own pocket—the arrest was a fact accomplished.

To get back with their prisoner to the post was the work of a moment. The crowd, now lacking determined leadership, wavered. The arrest left them dazed.

"All ready?"

The machine-gun crew and the men at the barrier nodded.

The Inspector hailed the crowd.

"Get out!" he shouted. "Do you hear? The first man moving this way will mean the end of the lot of you! Remember my Maxim!"

Then both sides waited, facing each other, in intense silence.

This was the crisis. Which was it to be—a fight or a retreat?

"Don't fire, sir, till they're right on us!" whispered Kellett. "Never do, sir, never do!"

The mob gathered itself together, yelling. The Police maintained their ominous silence. Motionless, they faced the mob—twelve men against three hundred. The flag above them blew out gloriously in the breeze.

Suddenly the toughs charged.

Gemmell's face was marble, under dried streaks of blood. This, surely, was the end. Bullets whistled round them, the crowd opening fire as it advanced.

"Machine-gun, ready there!"

"Ready!"

The mob had forgotten the machine-gun. Every man heard that firm cry, "Machine-gun, ready there!" and the answer, "Ready!" Now they remembered. Quick as lightning, a mental picture flashed through them . . . a picture of the pass, blocked with their bodies, dominated by a devil of brass and steel.

And the rush—melted away. Melted away!

The Police were left with their prisoner. The crowd went sullenly pouring back to Prospect in defeat.

Gemmell drew a deep breath. The tense line relaxed.

It was hard to believe the mob had given way, not on account of the carbines but simply and solely on account of the mere threat of the Maxim.

For the Maxim had been frozen up for the past twenty minutes.

"Bluffed 'em, by the Lord Harry!" said Gemmell.

IV

Greasy Jones and Mr. Steven Molyneux, M. P., sat opposite each other in the little room wherein they had held their first conversation, months before.

On the stairs outside, Greasy Jones' spy, whom Northcote knew as Charlie, kept watch. Charlie had fulfilled his duty faithfully. Greasy was well aware that Welland had not 'squealed.'

"Look here," said Welland forcibly. "What are you kicking at? Haven't you been paid regularly? Isn't everything O. K.?"

The gangster started moodily at the candle flame.

"Don't misunderstand me, Molyneux," he said. "I ain't kickin'. But I do think things ain't goin' as good as they oughta have gone."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Welland impatiently. "What's the matter with them? Isn't Black Elk in a turmoil? Aren't the miners demanding the resignation of the Lieutenant-Governor and half the administration? Hasn't a petition as long as Hopeful Pass gone round calling for the transference of governing powers to the miners? Haven't we got more than enough arms in the country to overthrow the Police? Isn't every man in Black Elk ready to follow you as soon as you appear? Haven't you slipped in half your gang? And your talkers? Aren't the Police asleep? What more do you want?"

"Just listen to me a minute. When we first thought o' this thing, the idea was we was to make the first-comers sore about the others who came in later an' struck it rich first. Wasn't that so?"

"Yes," said Welland.

"Well, now we've got the *whole country* stirred up, not only the first-comers. An' that's dangerous. I mean, the yallah-legs is all the more liable to get on to what we're really tryin' to do."

"Now, don't be a fool, Greasy. The idea certainly was to stir up the first-comers; and we've done it, too. But I promised to help from my side. Well, I have. I got men all through the country to bribe the recorders and different government officials until the whole thing's just rotten with corruption. I got 'em to try to bribe the Police, too, but no luck so far. Never mind; the Territory's rotten. And the result? Why, everyone but the old prospectors and a few fools is on our side, instead of just the first-comers!"

"Where do the first-comers get in, then?"

"Why, I'll show you," said Welland. "We keep what we intend to do *after* the turn-over quiet. The Police think the whole country's against 'em. Then, when that's over, the first-comers and us—that is, you and your gang—we tell the rest, 'We're running this show now!' See? Then we put them in their places—quick!"

"That's what you once said me an' my gang 'ud do to the first-comers," said Greasy. "We was to get *them* stirred up

only. Then we was to throw *them* down only. Now what do we do with 'em? Are *they* to be thrown down, too?"

"Why, yes!" exclaimed Welland. "They throw the others down. Then we throw *them* down. Is that clear?"

"A hell of a lot o' throwin' down!" muttered the mollified gangster. "But I guess I see. Has all that been kept hidden, though?"

"Certainly! None but your gang and a few men in with us know that we're going to smash the Government by force, if force is necessary. We've been preaching peace the whole time. Nor do they know that we're going to throw down the others when we're ready. See?"

"I guess I see," said Greasy again. "'Stead o' just a small crowd to scare the yallah-legs, we get everyone. And afterwards we gets our fling. That right?"

"Got it!"

"You're even slicker than I thought," the gangster remarked admiringly. "Say, I don't like the way the yallah-legs got No-nose. Suppose he squeals?"

"I know for a fact he hasn't squealed."

"You do?" asked the gangster quickly.

"Yes. He daren't. He knows what's coming. And he knows you'd kill him if you got at him and the scheme failed."

"That's so. Well, about these here arms. The yallah-legs has got most o' 'em. Don't they suspect nothin'?"

"Nobody knows what you're sending them through for, do they? Nor who's sending them? Nor where they go to?"

"No. They don't even know it's me sendin' 'em. They're told to leave 'em at a certain place in Nugget. Then O'Brien calls an' gets 'em an' stows 'em away. An' they stays stowed till wanted. An' O'Brien daren't squeal, 'cause I got him watched. An' he knows it."

"Well, what are you afraid of?"

"Just that the yallah-legs has smelt trouble."

"They haven't. And, anyway, they'd never connect these arms with you or with any big plan."

Greasy was satisfied—till he raised another point.

"I ain't got half my men I wants through the pass; not

more'n twenty. An' it's gettin' harder all the time to get 'em through. An' we tried to rush the pass—that is, some o' the boys did, an' 'bout thirty o' my men behind, so's the yallah-legs wouldn't see 'em. An' what happened? Why that li'l squirt of an officer an' his twelve men wouldn't let 'em through—kep' 'em off with a bloody Maxim!"

Welland felt tempted to tell the gangster that the crowd had been bluffed. But he refrained.

"Why did you try it?" he demanded.

"Well, you remember you said we could try it if we weren't gettin' men through quick enough."

"Pah! None of the crowd had the guts to make a real charge."

"At a Maxim? They ain't crazy."

The gangster spat scornfully on the floor.

"Oh, never mind. We'll smuggle a few more through before we shoot."

The gangster grunted.

"Are you sure the yallah-legs is asleep?" he asked.

"Certain. But I'll find out again before you slip across the line. Anything else?"

"You bet!" Greasy sat up and looked fiercely at his companion. "How do I know you won't double-cross me yet? You—a Canadian M. P.?"

"My dear Greasy," said Welland, with an air of infinite patience. "Suppose I did? Couldn't you give away *my* part of the show—and ruin me?"

"I s'pose so," the gangster admitted. "But I ain't let on about it to anyone."

"Why not?" the politician enquired derisively.

"An' have you get to know it? *Then* you'd squeal on me sure!"

"That's right. So we understand each other!" Welland smiled.

This delightful pair most certainly possessed an amazing mutual understanding!

Followed a pause, while they lit cigars.

"Like to know what *I've* done?" the gangster asked.

"Well, I've got all the Prospect toughs behind me—ready to

rush in as soon as we let 'em from inside. My men are just hintin' to 'em quiet that the li'l old U. S. is goin' to back us later. Also, the same thing among the guys in Black Elk. That's bolsterin' 'em up. An' later, we'll tell it that it's so, for sure." Welland nodded. "Then—look here!"

From a corner the gangster produced a large bag. Emptying it, he revealed notepaper, stamps, rubber stamps, and a flag. He spread the smaller articles out on the table and held up the flag by the corners.

"Look!" he repeated.

Welland, eyebrows raised, complied.

The paper bore the device of a black elk's head, with the slogan, 'Liberty or Death' above it, below it the words, 'The Black Elk Republic,' and at one side, 'F. D. Jones, President.' The rubber stamps bore similar legends, with such captions as 'Board of Health' and 'Department of Justice.' The stamps were white, with the black elk's head and motto. The flag was also white, with the same device and the initials, 'B. E. R.'

"Splendid!" said Welland. "Splendid!"

He seemed struck with the assurance and determination which had caused these things to be prepared.

"Notice I'm president?" Greasy grinned.

"You bet! Why, this is fine! Real revolution—and no mistake about it!"

"Sure thing! Pretty fine, eh?"

"I—er—hope you were careful in having these things made, though," said Welland slowly, as an afterthought.

"Careful!" Greasy was scornful. "The flag was made by my woman. She's under my heel! She's made six. Everything else was made by men that I've got where I want, don't worry."

The gangster stowed his treasures away.

"When do you think we'd better spring it?" he enquired.

"Soon as the country's thoroughly tied up," said Welland. "Less than a month now, I guess—first heavy snow. Eh?"

The gangster nodded.

"You'll send me word?"

"Either that or come down and see you. It's getting hard

for me to get away now. But trust me. Now, is there anything else?"

Greasy pondered.

"Oh, I was forgettin' to tell you I been tappin' the telegraph lines from Discovery to Prospect for the past week. An' I'll keep it up till we're ready."

"Why, you're a genius!" Welland cried. "I never thought of that. Anything important come through? You know, all the messages for Canada have to come down by that line."

"Yep, I know. Guess that's why I'm doin' it. I *am* a genius, I guess. No, nothin' much's come through yet. But, if there does, I'll know it."

"Fine. Well, that's all, eh? All right. Say, this is going to be great, Greasy! Shake!"

The two friends shook, mightily satisfied.

v

Hector, coming into his quarters one night, found awaiting him the first of his usual visitors—Welland.

"Cold night," said Hector cordially. "Glad to see you've stoked up the stove."

"Yes," said Welland. "Look at this."

He held up Hector's ink-bottle, placed on a table outside the immediate circle of the warmth. The ink was curdling into ice.

"I told Blythe to put the bottle on the stove," Hector said. "He's forgetful. Had a good trip?"

"Fine. Went to Prospect. I'm writing home my impressions, you know—have done for some time—and I thought I'd get acquainted with that hell-hole. Hadn't really time when I last visited it. I wanted to contrast it with Discovery City, thinking it would throw the wonderful order and quiet of Black Elk into strong relief."

"And?"

"Why, it's the finest contrast I ever clapped eyes on. Fact! This place is Paradise. But no wonder. Look at your men! Why, the way that kid Gemmell held the pass—it's marvellous!"

"I'd have flayed him if he'd let 'em through," said Hector grimly. "Still, it was a good piece of work."

"Things might be worse than they are here if a few of those swine got in."

"Yes. But there are none of that type here."

"None?"

"No."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," Welland smiled. "If those Prospect toughs had a hand in the present unrest, for instance——"

"We'd be up against a big thing."

"Yes."

"But, as it is, there's a difference."

"Aren't you alarmed?"

"By the present situation? No."

"There's a lot of discontent," Welland reminded him.

"And many tough characters. And they're armed."

"Yes. But they're sensible. They won't try violence."

Welland fingered his beard reflectively.

"Why are you so sure?" he asked.

"Well, I know positively they're not preaching violence. And I know their opinion of the Mounted Police."

"I see," said Welland slowly. "I see."

Just then Blythe put his head in.

"Dr. Quick's waitin' outside, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Hector. "Tell him I'm coming. I go round the hospital every night with Quick, you know, Molyneux. Who's that with you in the next room, Blythe?"

"Charlie, sir—Mr. Northcote's man."

"Oh, yes. Well, excuse me, won't you, Molyneux?"

And Hector, smiling pleasantly, departed.

"The fool!" Welland's lip curled sardonically. "We've got him buffaloed, by God! The poor—blind—fool!"

VI

Late that night Antoine, best and fastest dog-driver in North America, was summoned to Police headquarters with an intimation that he was required for a long and arduous

journey. Antoine was not surprised. Surprise was beneath his principles. Besides, he was often employed on special missions by the Police, who knew his inflexible fidelity.

A French-Canadian half-breed was Antoine, a man in his prime, built on the slim lines of a runner, deep-chested, broad-shouldered. Born in a Hudson's Bay post, there was no trail of the North unknown to Antoine, no team he could not handle. To him, a run of one hundred miles a day was next to nothing; and he was as punctual as the sun itself.

Dressed for the trail, parka hood thrown back, dogs and sled outside, Antoine waited patiently in the outer office, smoking his short pipe and spitting reflectively at the stove while the Superintendent, Manitou-pewabic, prepared a despatch in the next room.

Presently he was summoned into the Presence.

Behind the lamp sat the Superintendent, quiet, gigantic—in Antoine's eyes, a god and hero.

"Cold night, Antoine."

Antoine nodded.

Hector held out a large official envelope, carefully sealed.

"For our representative in Prospect," he said. "You will hand it over to him, Antoine, and wait there for an answer. You may have to wait several days. The Sergeant there will give you the answer and you will bring it back to me here."

Antoine nodded again.

"Guard both despatch and answer with your life. No-one must see the despatch but the Sergeant. No-one must see the answer till you give it to me. Tell no-one your business either way. You must travel fast, Antoine, very fast—both going and coming; faster than ever before."

Antoine's eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

"All right. Now, this"—the Superintendent handed him a small, unsealed envelope—"is a letter which you will show to any Mounted Policeman or Mounted Police post, if necessary. It authorizes you to claim any assistance you wish. Understand?"

Antoine nodded.

"Dogs in good shape? That's fine. Start at once, Antoine."

Good luck and goodbye. Remember—the fastest trip you’ve ever made——”

Antoine carefully stowed the two envelopes away and, drawing himself to his full height, saluted the Superintendent gravely.

A moment later, whirling his whip, he swept off behind his dogs, fleeing like a shadow, under the mysterious sheen of the northern lights—swept off into the vast silence, down the Prospect trail.

Welland, roused from sleep by the jingle of bells, gave a thought to the ‘poor blind fool,’ turned over in bed and slept again.

Chapter V

I

In Hector's view, the biggest man, mentally or spiritually, in Black Elk Territory, was Northcote—by this time one of his closest friends.

With the approach of the long winter night and the slowing down of the wheels of Black Elk activity, Hector saw more of Northcote than ever. The clergyman liked to talk to the Superintendent, whom he ardently admired. Hector liked to talk to the clergyman, because Northcote knew Life as few men know it, was charitable and merciful, friend of the fallen, rarely criticising, never condemning—no pink-tea preacher, shivering at the sight of sin, but a great knight wielding a mighty lance in the heart of the dark fight. So Hector liked him.

From Northcote—though the clergyman did not know it—Hector learned much.

Northcote had several favourite themes. And, reclining in his chair, pipe in mouth, feet on the stove, he would ramble on in his deep, quiet voice, from one theme to another, as the spirit moved him, while Hector sat content to listen.

Men open their hearts to each other in that way.

"Came across a queer case today—" Northcote would begin; he always ruminated on these occasions; never preached—"a boy here who struck it fairly rich this summer; and he wants to buy a claim to work next year—a big claim, that will make his pile for life. But his mother, in Nova Scotia, is dying. Her only chance is to get to Florida or some mild climate. To send her there will cost the boy most of his summer's takings. And that means—no claim next year. He's got to choose between his claim and his mother—a nasty situation for an ambitious lad—a nasty situation.

“Well, I converted him to the right way of thinking. Gave him a little sermon on Sacrifice, gilding the pill. This boy is the type which hates anything churchy. So I left out the biggest sacrifice of all. But I told him about Nelson, going back to sea, maimed and dog-tired of it as he was, to blockade Cadiz in his uncomfortable little ships and, eventually, to win Trafalgar. I tried to show him how there’s not a really successful business man who hasn’t had to make great sacrifices to achieve success. He was interested in learning what our early explorers endured to open up the country. In the end, he realized, I think, that all big things, everything worth while, is won by sacrifice. ‘And usually,’ I said, ‘there comes a time, at least once in every man’s life, when he must make one big concrete sacrifice. Sydney made it,’ I said, ‘when he gave that cup of water to the dying soldier. He wanted that water so badly himself. But he gave it up. Once in every man’s life,’ I said, ‘the time of his great sacrifice comes. Your time has come to you now.’”

“And the boy—?” asked Hector.

“Is sending off the money by tomorrow’s mail.”

The words stuck in Hector’s memory: ‘Everything worth while is won by sacrifice.’ ‘Once in every man’s life, the time of his great sacrifice comes.’

Of one thing he was certain: everything *he* had achieved, thus far, had been won by grim, fierce sacrifice—the sacrifice of self to state. But had the time of his great sacrifice come—or was it still upon the way?

He could not answer that question—yet.

II

In the crisis rapidly approaching, Hector, on whom so much depended, was conscious of great moral support.

First, he saw that the level-headed old-timers were with him. They were not numerous and their influence was small. But individually each man of them was worth any two of the clamorous adventurers among whom discontent was flourishing.

Then there was the great moral support of the Commis-

sioner. In those anxious days when the temper of the crowd was sweeping towards its climax, he often recalled the Commissioner's encouraging farewell on his transference to the gold area: 'It's the last bit of true pioneering this country will see, Adair. . . . It will be a big job—one of the biggest we've ever done, . . . but it will be a splendid thing in the way of a crowning achievement to all you've done already. Make it a credit to yourself and Canada.' These words were to him a tremendous driving force, a great source of inspiration. Remembering them, he could feel that, though thousands of miles lay between him and headquarters, though Black Elk Territory was cut off from the rest of Canada, there was still at headquarters a keen, strong personality, watching his every move intently, pouring bright rays of faith and power and confidence in his direction.

Greater than all this, however, was the moral support lent him by the people of Canada—the real Canada, beyond the mountains. He knew that its weight was behind him. With each mail he received letters and papers telling him that this was so. Politicians—Welland's political tools and henchmen—might be against him. But the people, the great, long-suffering, oft-deluded and victimised people, whose hearts could not betray them—from coast to coast they knew that in Superintendent Adair they had a man. They recognised his strength and integrity, and they trusted him to see that the dignity of Canada was maintained, the law of Canada enforced, in Black Elk Territory. With such support, Hector felt that he would gladly stand against the world.

One item in particular, clipped by Hugh from a powerful Eastern paper, voiced the general feeling well. Hector had read it, wavering between amazement and humility. It was high-flown nonsense, of course; but, with the storm fast closing upon him, he found much comfort in the memory of its sentiment.

'In Superintendent Adair'—it ran—'the Canadian people have a worthy representative. He is a fighter, born and bred, son of a veteran of the Peninsula and Waterloo. So he is a living link with the Empire's great traditions, with the blood of British heroes in his veins. Adair was brought

up for an officer ; and to those who know him he is the personification of the best type of British officer, whose soul is in his corps, who thinks only of the steep and narrow path of Duty. But he is more than that. Fate killed his prospects of an early Commission. Nevertheless, being determined to serve, he joined the original North-West Mounted Police and fought his way up through ten strenuous years to commissioned rank. And he has continued to advance ever since. Today he is looked upon in the West as the embodiment, in one individuality, of the entire North-West Mounted Police. And the comparison is apt, for we find in Adair all those high qualities of devotion, ability, firmness, strength and determination which we have learned to expect of the Mounted Police. Some even speak of him as the embodiment of Western Canada. And this too, is apt, for he has grown up with the country, kept up with and done much to aid its advance. And the qualities we attribute to Western Canada, once more, are Adair's. Out there, they call him by the name the Indians gave him—Manitou-pewabic—a tribute to his personality, for the phrase means 'Spirit-of-Iron.' Surely this is the spirit which has made not only the man, but the Force to which he belongs and the country which is its environment—Spirit-of-Iron!

'This is the man today responsible for maintaining the Queen's authority in Black Elk. He has a desperate job on hand. We have heard of the unrest sweeping the Territory from end to end—unrest which may end in serious trouble. Cut off from the rest of Canada and with only a handful of men, Adair is sitting on a powder-barrel. That the disgruntled cut-throats returning from the country are so loud in their abuse of the Superintendent, however, is the greatest possible tribute. Adair has handled many such in his time and none has ever beaten him. . . . Whatever may yet happen in Black Elk, Adair may rest confident that Canada looks to him. And, on their part, the Canadian people may rest confident that the country's honour is absolutely safe in the care of this modern Lion of the North.'

"The personification of the British officer . . . and of the Mounted Police . . . and of Western Canada . . . this

modern Lion of the North'! Rubbish! Nonsense! But there was more truth in this article than Hector would recognize. At any rate, with the words before him, he was resolved humbly to do his best to serve these people, resolved firmly to see that, while life remained to him, whatever lay ahead, he would not fail them.

III

The exodus of miners from the creeks to the towns was now reaching alarming proportions. It was known to all men that the unrest and discontent was risen almost to high-water mark. No violence had been preached. The law-abiding element, from the Lieutenant-Governor down, had no idea that there was organisation in it all and still less that the real purpose of those secretly behind the movement was swift—perhaps bloody—revolution. But they sensed a menace vaguely—like horses in a field, restlessly switching tails and ears when a tempest is in the air.

From the Lieutenant-Governor down, they placed their confidence in one man—Spirit-of-Iron. The Lieutenant-Governor, among many others, had, in fact, told him so.

"They're going to spring something, Adair," he had said. "Nothing extreme. But they're going to ask for my resignation. They don't trust me. But you can handle them. Adair, I'm afraid it will be up to you."

Then, with stunning suddenness, came the news—terrible news to the law-abiding element, glorious news to the rest—that Spirit-of-Iron was ill, perhaps upon his death-bed! The Lieutenant-Governor felt that the solid rock on which he stood had melted away.

Blythe, stammering, white-faced, brought the news to Dr. Quick, who hurried over. All the twinkle went out of the doctor's eyes when he saw Hector.

"He *would* go round the infectious wards with me!" the doctor groaned, cursing himself. "It's typhus!"

It was easy to isolate the patient. But to keep the news from the lawless crowd was impossible. Within twenty-four

hours the whole Territory knew that the one man the malcontents really feared was *hors de combat*.

There was a waitress in Discovery, known to every soul in town as Seattle Sue. Her face was painted, her hair dyed, her language unfit for drawing-rooms, but she had that rare physical phenomenon, a heart of pure gold. In the early days of the rush, when the temporary hospitals were full, this girl had volunteered to nurse in her spare time—no small sacrifice, since her duties as a waitress occupied twelve hours daily. Today, Seattle Sue was the best nurse in Discovery.

“We’ll get Seattle Sue!” said Dr. Quick. “We *must* save him!”

Here it was, too, that Nita Oswald showed the mettle of her pastures. Appreciating what it all meant, she was at Hector’s door, offering her services, before the doctor had finished his preliminary examination.

With Blythe and the doctor, the two women made a powerful quadruple alliance. But the stake was tremendous. It would tax them all to the utmost to pull Hector through.

Outside, day after day, the crowd clamoured for bulletins. The men of the Force threatened mutiny if they, at least, were not kept informed. But Lancaster would allow no bulletins. It was better that the malcontents should not know that the great chief was dying.

The delirium, the worst feature of the case, came on in a few days. At times the Superintendent was quite calm, whispering, muttering, sighing, smiling; then they guessed, from phrases here and there, that he thought himself a boy again or at home. At others he talked violently, shouted, gave orders, laughed; then they knew that he was living through his daily life in the Force, as he had lived it twenty years, or fighting over many of his desperate battles. At other times—most frequent—he became a raving lunatic, at grips with some awful menace, struggling against terrific odds, crying bitterly over his physical helplessness, making desperate efforts to get up and rush outside. They did not know that at these times he was dealing with the local crisis.

In sane moments, as he insisted, they kept him informed of the situation.

To Hector, his illness was a mad jumble of mental pictures, sometimes awful, sometimes pleasant; interspersed with lapses of clear sanity, when the agony of his position reached its height. And it went like this:

He saw himself a small, brown-headed boy, on the lakes and in the woods of his old Ontario home. He saw himself fighting his first fight in the cause of chivalry, for Nora; and suddenly his opponent became Welland, whom he fought furiously, though why he could not say. Then Sergeant Pierce, long and tanned and solemn, came and stood before him, as vividly as if he were alive and in the room. But they were not in the room. They were in the stable-yard, at home. The Sergeant was giving him advice—the old slogan: ‘Fight, little master, till the last shot’s fired!’

‘Till the last shot’s fired!’ Yes, he must fight till . . . but against what? And why? Suddenly he remembered and, remembering, wept, cursing his great weakness and the Fate that held him helpless at the crisis of his life.

Then his father came to talk to him—out of the air. He saw the fine old gentleman in the library at Silvercrest with a small boy at his knee. He was telling stories—stories of days long past, of Adairs who had been mighty fighters, nobly serving King and Country, each in his time. As he talked, he took the small boy up to the coat-of-arms on the mantelpiece and made him touch it and the motto beneath:

‘Strong. Steadfast.’—‘Strong. Steadfast.’

He heard his father’s voice: ‘The Adair motto for centuries, Hector. An Adair must always be strong and steadfast.’

‘An Adair must always be strong and steadfast.’ And surely strong and steadfast now—now—when the crisis was upon him. ‘Strong. Steadfast.’ And here he was, helpless in bed, while the trumpets sounded for battle and he was not there!

Sometimes his mother came—sweet-faced, white-haired—smiling—touching his face with gentle fingers. He took her in his arms and kissed her. As their lips touched, she be-

came suddenly young and beautiful—became, not herself, in the days of her youth—but Frances. He was in Arcady with Frances. He heard himself making his humble confession—thrilled to her reply—gave a glad, wild cry of joy and swung her off her feet, kissing her madly. A hand came out then, from nowhere, tearing her away—her father's hand. No, not her father's—Welland's. Why Welland's? Why? She was gone—his arms were empty. And he knew himself back in Discovery, weeping for her whom he had lost fifteen dreary years ago.

Nita Oswald and Seattle Sue heard that name, 'Frances! Frances!' many, many times. Afterwards, while they wondered what it meant, they swore never to betray the secret the Big Chief had unwittingly revealed.

Sometimes he fancied himself making his first arrest—the arrest of Red-hot Dan. He saw the whiskey-trader at his door—but the face was Welland's. Welland came out, shot at him, missed. Hector ran to his horse—galloped away—with Welland after him. His enemy required no horse but pursued on foot, travelling like the wind. Hector rode at a furious pace, over hill and dale, for hundreds—thousands—of miles, until it seemed he had been riding months and years—but still Welland followed him, tirelessly. Then he found himself on the ground, half-stunned, his horse beside him, Welland bending over him, pointing a rifle, grinning hideously. And Moon came out of thin air to thrust herself before the murderer. Hector struggled to his feet and called her. She stretched out her arms. He stepped to meet her—and found—Mrs. MacFarlane. For some unfathomable reason, he hated her. Thrusting her aside, he fronted Welland once more. And yet it was not Welland—but Whitewash Bill. He advanced, without a weapon, to meet him—advanced—and the outlaw became a trumpeter, sounding the Reveillé.

Gone, instantly, were all Hector's hates and fears. Enwapt, he heard the clear call soaring to the stars—soar and die, quivering, to merge into the 'Fall in.' Before the call finished, the trumpeter had vanished. But the magic notes went on and drifted into other calls, till he had heard them

all, the calls that were the very voice of the Service he loved. Then came wonderful sights—long dear to him—the far-crying trumpet playing perpetual accompaniment. He saw the old Force riding westward—westward—on the first march to the Rockies; saw the sentry at Broncho, smart as a Russian prince in fur coat, cap, gauntlets, burnished bandolier; saw his old division drilling—glorious ‘J’—a mounted parade—saw the long scarlet line circle and wheel, heard the tremendous thunder of innumerable hoofs; and still the trumpet sounded. The thunder of hoofs swelled to roars of applause. The packed hall at Broncho rose before him and the Marquis, appearing from the dead, bowed and began to sing, over and over again, the chorus of a song about himself, sung by the men of the Force everywhere for their love of, and pride in, him:

*Hi, you bad young Nitchie, there is someone goin’ to git ye;
Hi, you bad old outlaw!—An’ he’s never known to fail.
He’s the soul of Law and Order, so you’d better cross the
border,
When Manitou-pewabic’s on the trail!*

His heart went out passionately towards these men. Suddenly, there was a change. Darkness came over the hall. The trumpet, which, somehow, had all the while been sounding, changed its tune to some ominous, terrible call—the ‘Last Post’—symbolical of the end—and of Death—the funeral call! A Union Jack at the end of the room, growing suddenly to gigantic proportions, was torn to shreds. Lightning and thunder stormed around it. The trumpet call died, shuddering. There came a noise like a mighty whirlwind and through the shreds a two-headed monster thrust itself—its faces the faces of Welland and Molyneux—one and yet not the same. Hector awoke, in an agony.

Then, in moments of lucid thinking, he realised his weakness to the full and saw the situation in all its horror. He saw the great crisis, not definitely, but as a vague, impenetrable menace, coming upon him—Welland, somehow, mixed up in it—and could do nothing to divert it. Lancaster had

told him, at one time, that the miners, seeking to take advantage of his illness, were planning a great meeting at which they proposed to present their demands. Knowing this, he strove to overcome his weakness, strove piteously and failed. No other officer in Black Elk could deal with the approaching menace. He felt that; but could not fathom it, while he felt it. Again, since his illness, a terrific blizzard had come up—one of the worst ever known. The telegraph lines were down, Hopeful Pass was blocked and all communication with the outside world was cut off. Antoine had not returned. Even *he* could not return in the blizzard. Suppose he did not return before the meeting—what then? What then? Again and again, Hector asked for Antoine and received from Lancaster the hopeless answer, ‘He has not come back.’ This drove him, time without number, to try to reach the window, to see if Antoine had returned or the blizzard moderated and, that effort thwarted, kept him tossing in despair upon his bed.

In his agony, he saw a crash, himself utterly disgraced, all his twenty-odd years of service gone for nothing, the trust of his men and of his country turned into a mockery. This was the end of his dreams.

The Lion of the North lay dying, at the mercy of his foes at last.

He felt like that other of the Bible, helpless in his cot, while Fate shrieked in his ear: ‘The Philistines are upon thee, Samson!’

The spark of his great courage, which had won for him his tribal name, ‘Spirit-of-Iron,’ struggled fiercely in those terrible hours—struggled, but flickered and burned low——

“I’m afraid we’re going to lose him,” said Dr. Quick, blinking behind his big round glasses.

Outside, consternation held the law-abiding element.

The Lion of the North lay dying, at the mercy of his foes at last.

IV

Through Blythe, Hector eventually turned the corner.

He awoke one night to find himself suddenly calm, self-

possessed and comfortable, though as weak as ever. At first, having no idea of what had happened to him, he stared childishly 'round the room, struggling for light. Then gradually he made out a man, wrapped in a blanket and lying at the foot of the bed.

"Who's that?" he asked. "Who's that?"

He thought he spoke loudly. Actually, his voice was little better than a whisper.

But the man in the blanket sat up, discovering the wan, intensely woe-begone face of Blythe.

"Did you call, sir?"

"Who's that? Is that——"

Try as he would, he could not remember the name of his own servant!

"Blythe, sir."

"Oh, yes, Blythe. Why aren't you in bed, Blythe?"

"Bed, sir? Why—why, sir—the fact is"—a suspicious huskiness crept into Blythe's voice and his dismal face quivered—"they said as you was dyin', sir——"

"*Dying?*"

"Yes, sir. The doctor gave you up tonight, sir. An' Miss Oswald—an' that Seattle Sue—they was dog-tired. So—I wanted to be near, sir—when you—pegged out—an' I told 'em to take a rest, an'—an'——"

Here words failed the faithful and tender-hearted Blythe and he began to blubber miserably.

"Why, Blythe! You idiot—you fool, I'm all right! Stop it at once—and turn up the lamp."

Hector was actually laughing at Blythe, with a touch of his old humour. The sight of that doleful face, combined with the assertion that he was dying, had brought back the Big Chief from the edge of the Great Divide.

Blythe, delighted, jumped up, turned up the lamp and hastened out, returning in a moment with Dr. Quick.

"What's this? What's this?" said the doctor, twinkling. "Blythe told me to come quick, because you're coming 'round. I'm Quick, Major, at all times, but never quicker than I've been now."

The familiar pun brought another smile to the wasted face.

"Thank God," said the doctor, solemnly, after investigation, "you'll do."

Then he gave Hector a sleeping draught.

When Hector awoke again, it was to find Lancaster at his bedside. Never had he seen a man in a state of greater thankfulness. And behind him were the doctor, Nita and Seattle Sue.

"We've decided," said Lancaster, "that it will be best for Discovery City generally to remain ignorant of your recovery—for the present. Meanwhile, Major, you must keep quiet and get well."

"I agree as to the first remark and also as to getting well. But I can't keep quiet," said Hector.

"You *must*," the doctor insisted.

"I *can't*," Hector asserted. "If you want me to get well quickly, you'll relieve my mind. Mr. Lancaster, I must see you alone—now."

The Lieutenant-Governor reluctantly signed to the others to leave the room.

"What time is it?" asked Hector.

"Three o'clock in the afternoon."

"And the date?"

Lancaster told him.

"How long have I been ill?"

"Twelve days."

"Good God! Twelve days! My God, what time I've lost!"

"There's a chance for you to play your part yet. The blizzard has postponed the big meeting for a week. The miners from the outlying camps couldn't travel."

"Thank God for that! I've a week in which to recover—and prepare. We must keep the change secret, as you said just now. Surprise is the first element of success."

"It is. No-one will know you've turned the corner."

"Has Antoine returned?"

The Lieutenant-Governor's face grew serious.

"No. He must have been held up. I doubt, now, if he can get here in time."

"He must!" Hector struggled to sit up in bed. "So much

depends on it. He must get through. He cannot fail us, surely——”

The Lieutenant-Governor put out a hand.

“Don’t excite yourself, Adair. Take it quietly, man; take it quietly.”

The Superintendent fell back exhausted.

“Has the blizzard died down?”

“Yes. There’s still a chance.”

“Well, we must get ready.”

“But you’re really not fit.”

“Nonsense. You told me once you were looking to me.”

“God knows that’s true—but——”

“Well, I’m better now.”

Lancaster stared at the emaciated face, set in its iron-hard lines, and gained a deeper sense of the man’s indomitable will.

“You must rest now. Promise me,” he said.

“On one condition: that you send Forshaw to me tonight.”

“You’re really not fit——”

“My God, Lancaster,” Hector groaned in an agony; “how *can* I rest with this thing before me? You *must* do as I ask.”

The Lieutenant-Governor silently pressed the sick man’s hand, trying to express in that simple action all he felt.

“I’ll send him, Major,” he said.

When Lancaster left him, Hector lay gasping. The effort of the interview, short as it had been, had completely played him out. The realization wounded him bitterly. The man whose physical strength was proverbial was, he had discovered, at this crisis, as incapable of action as a baby. He revolted madly against it, but the fact remained. As with his body, so with his brain. Fiercely as he tried, now, to form some plan, he found himself utterly unable to do it. His penetration, his self-control and powers of concentration were all gone. He could not get Antoine out of his mind. The man’s absence tortured him, shut out everything else. Through the coming days, this was to dominate his thoughts, jeering, like a fiend, at his helplessness.

Exhaustion brought him rest at last.

Blythe awakened him some hours later, with a collation prepared from eggs. Hector took the glass, astonished. Eggs were as rare as women in Black Elk.

"You bin havin' 'em ever since you got sick, sir," said Blythe proudly.

"I have, eh? A dollar apiece! This will ruin me financially, I see that."

"No 't'won't, sir," exclaimed Blythe quickly.

He watched his chief drink the mixture with intense satisfaction.

"How's that?"

"Well, sir—" Blythe became hesitant. "Fact is—Sergeant Savage, he said he'd break my neck if I told you—the boys passed 'round the hat, sir—seein' you were ill, it was all they could do——"

"You mean—" said Hector slowly, "that the men bought these eggs for me, out of their pay?"

"Yessir," said Blythe, now shamefaced, feeling himself a traitor. "You've had six or seven dozen, sir."

Hector put down the glass. Tears welled up in his eyes. Blythe looked desperate.

"I'm not ashamed of them, Blythe," said Hector thickly. "God bless the boys—God bless 'em."

Finishing the drink, he felt better. And, somehow, Blythe's confession had helped him wonderfully. The collective strength of the men seemed to pass into him.

"What's the time, Blythe?"

"'Bout seven, sir."

"Right. Finish your job and clear out. Inspector Forshaw will be here soon."

With Blythe's departure, Hector gathered himself together for the great effort facing him. His brain was working more freely, but his physical weakness filled him with panic.

"God, but this illness must have pulled me down," he thought, and with the thought resolved to see if it was so.

Against all orders, he got out of bed and put his slippers on. The effort was stupendous. The room swam before his eyes and he thought himself about to faint. But he set his teeth, calling all his tremendous will-power to his aid,

feeling that inestimable things depended on his success or failure now. Then, clutching at the bed, the chair, the table, for support, he made a tragic and heart-breaking pilgrimage on his trembling legs across the narrow space to the shaving mirror by the lamp. Sweat streaming down his face, his heart pounding furiously, he looked into the mirror—received a stunning shock——

His face had shrunk to livid whiteness and was as thin as a knife. Two black hollows showed 'round his eyes, two in his wasted cheeks. His bloodless lips were set tight and his hair—almost in a night—had become streaked with grey.

That grey hair was the price of the mental torment he had endured. That face was the face of the man on whom depended everything in Black Elk, that raw skeleton actually all that stood between Lancaster and his enemies. Then God help Lancaster!

Exhausted, he turned back to bed. How he reached it he never knew.

Presently came Forshaw's knock.

He braced himself to fight his great fight.

"Come in!"

A moment later he found himself haltingly dictating orders to the little Adjutant.

Chapter VI

I

In a small room in a low-down house in Discovery, Welland and Greasy Jones met secretly.

Greasy had successfully made his way through Hopeful Pass in disguise and was now in hiding in this low-down house, awaiting the hour of the miners' rally, when the long and carefully planned coup was to be made and Black Elk Territory declared a republic.

The rally was planned for eight o'clock that night. It was now six a. m.

The two conspirators had met to arrange the final details. Welland had not seen the gangster since their last meeting in Prospect. The risks were too great. And one meeting—this meeting—in Discovery was all he dared venture. Even now he was very nervous.

"You're sure everyone's asleep?" he asked. "And that no-one can overhear us?"

"Sure," replied Greasy impatiently. "There's only two people in the house. One's the owner, a man the yallah-legs don't suspect, the other's my woman—an' she don't count."

"Your—why did you bring *her* along? We don't want women here."

"You forget I was a respectable trader goin' to open store in Discovery," the gangster grinned. "An' t' have a wife along helped the effect."

"All right," said Welland apologetically. "Don't think me a fuss-cat, Greasy. But you understand—a man in my position——"

"What about a man in *mine*? If the yallah-legs knew I was here, I'd be behind the bars in two snorts——"

"Well, they don't," said Welland, "and won't—till too late. Now, do all hands know about the meeting?"

"Yes," smiled Greasy. "It's a meetin' to present a petition to his Nibs the Lieut. Gov. The first-comers, though, an' my men, has been tipped off to what's goin' to happen. They're all armed an' ready to fight, if necess'ry. Arms concealed, o' course. Are you sure the yallah-legs knows nothin'?"

"Of our intentions? Nothing! They think it's a tea party. Of course, they're scared—a little."

"Sure to be," Greasy agreed.

"How many of your men got through the pass?"

"'Bout thirty. Enough, I guess. That includes Philibert, Kelly, an' Pete—the best o' 'em. The Spaniard was spotted an', o' course, No-nose, early in the game."

"Good. And they're to take charge, if it comes to violence?"

"Yep. They'll be in the crowd, same as me."

"I've promised the Lieutenant-Governor to go on the platform with him. As an M. P., it's my place. You'll have to arrest me—for appearance' sake. You can let me out afterwards, but I must be arrested, with the rest of them."

"Yep. I understand. Now what about a programme?"

"Well, Lancaster proposes to speak first, pleading his case. Then the men with the petition plan to present it and answer him. I understand Adair may speak, too."

"Hell, yes," said Greasy fiercely. "I thought he was dyin'. Yesterday, when the news come 'round that he was better—why, it was a real surprise packet, that was!"

"It certainly was. Even I knew nothing about his recovery till it was announced."

"Damn the swine! It 'ud have served us perfectly if he'd died. Our biggest enemy out o' the way——!"

"That's true." Welland's voice was suddenly very sinister. "But I've a plan for settling him. Best we could have—puts him out at the start."

"What is it?"

"This: The time for us to throw down our cards is just after Lancaster and himself have spoken. Adair's had a flag hoisted above the platform. On a given signal, picked

men'll rush forward, led by yourself and your lieutenants, capture everyone on the platform, you'll say your say for the Republic, tear down the flag—run up your own—and tell Lancaster to order the Police to surrender. He'll do it, you bet, when he sees the odds—every man in Black Elk will be there. And—the Territory's ours!"

"That's O. K. But what about Adair?"

"We'll want a signal, won't we? And Adair out of the way? We all recognize him as the backbone of resistance, don't we? Well, you get a man you can trust—a dead shot; station him somewhere overlooking the platform; as soon as Adair finishes speaking, let him be shot down—kill him! That blows up your resistance—bang! And there's your signal!"

"By George, you're a slick 'un!"

"Do you agree?"

"You bet I do. I know just the man. It's settled, then. We shoot Adair!"

II

At six o'clock in the evening, Hector sat in his room, awaiting the hour of the meeting.

Though the week intervening since his recovery had done much for him, he was still pitifully thin and weak. His clothes sagged on him and his face was deathly. Only the determination to see the matter through personally kept him up. The Lieutenant-Governor and all his friends marvelled at his resolution.

He was quite calm.

Blythe came in.

"Please, sir," he said gloomily, "there's a woman wants to see you, sir. All in a hurry, she is—out o' breath. Matter o' life an' death, she says. Queer lookin', sir, queer."

"Never mind. Show her in."

The woman *was* queer. She was in the late forties. Her once beautiful hair had been dyed to hide the grey. She had been very pretty in her time, but was now flabby, unhealthy and inclined to fatness. And she was hopelessly painted and

pencilled. She wore a heavy fur coat. Hector had seen many of her kind—women of the streets.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

Horror crept into her eyes at sight of his emaciated face. Her nerves on the raw, she twisted her hands restlessly, looked here, there, everywhere.

"You needn't be afraid of me. What is it?" he said, very quietly.

She burst into a confession, the wildest, maddest thing he had ever heard. At the end, she was sobbing at his feet.

He listened and his face never changed in the slightest, but to become a little more set, a little sterner. Nor did he move a muscle—just sat motionless.

"You overheard this fellow talking to the man you live with?" he asked at last.

She nodded, crying.

"And he is to shoot me when I go up on the platform tonight?"

She nodded again.

"You don't know the man?"

"No. I was in the room upstairs. I heard them through the floor."

"I see. You wouldn't know his voice? You didn't hear his name?"

"No."

"I see." Still that calm, thoughtful tone. "They didn't mention where the shot was to come from?"

"No. Just from the crowd."

"So I'm to be shot by an unknown assassin from somewhere in the crowd—a crowd of at least ten thousand, from every part of Black Elk," he said bitterly.

"That's it," she said.

He knew that to discover the assassin in the crowd would be impossible.

There came a painful silence. Hector broke it.

"You won't tell me your man's name? Is it useless to ask?"

She nodded.

"I love him," she whispered.

"So I can't get at him. You won't even point out the house?"

"No."

"Won't anything I say drag the information from you?"

"Nothing will."

He considered a while, facing this terrible and unexpected menace.

"Suppose I arrest you?"

She started to her knees.

"Oh, for God's sake, no!" she gasped. "Don't do that! Sooner or later he—my man—he'd get at me, knowing I'd betrayed his plan. And he'd kill me. He'd kill me when you let me out, if not before."

"But I could jail him too. Suppose I keep you. I can get someone to identify you. Then I can arrest your man—and discover this assassin from him."

"You can't," she declared. "Not before the meeting. There isn't time. And anyway, I swear, before God, no-one knows me in Discovery."

"There's isn't time," he thought. "That's true."

"Well," he asked her, "what do you propose to do, when you leave here?"

"I'm going to clear out—to Prospect—leave this damn country—go home—right now."

"Right now, eh?" he repeated.

'I'll have you followed when you leave here and trace you to that precious man of yours,' had been his thought. But if she fled at once from Discovery, to follow her would be futile.

"Your man will follow and kill you just the same. He'll easily trace you and catch you up."

"I must chance that," she said desperately.

He saw that she was really resolved on immediate flight.

"Why don't you go back to your man?" he asked.

"After betraying his plans? And after he'd forbidden me to leave the house today? You don't know him!"

"Well, evidently, if I go, I'm certain to be shot," he smiled. "Isn't that so?"

"Yes," she muttered.

"Then—why did you come to warn me?"

"I can't—" she choked—"I can't stand by and see you shot!"

"Not even by your man's assassin?"

"Not even that."

"For Christ's sake, Major Adair," she burst out suddenly, "don't go!"

"That's for me to decide," he said grimly. "If you'd tell me where to find that assassin—I don't ask you to betray your man—I understand that side of it—you might save my life. Or if you'd come earlier——"

"I came as soon as I could," she protested. "Before God, that's true."

"All right. I believe you."

By this time, recovering a little, she had risen. He was thinking hard.

"Promise you won't go," she begged.

He looked at her—a piteous object, her powder trailed by tears.

"I promise—nothing," he said firmly.

"Oh, if you go, all this will be wasted—you know the risks I've run—I've been through hell today."

Her voice rang with agony and despair.

"I appreciate that," he answered quietly, "and thank you. Now—to get you away safely."

"Eh?"

She stared.

"You must be escorted," he went on, his coolness bewildering her, "or that man of yours will get you. A mail leaves here in half an hour—dog-train; the fastest run to Prospect going. I'll send you out with it. It's under Police escort. You'll be safe."

"I—I don't know—what to say——"

"Don't say anything," he answered. "I owe you this for your warning. And—before you go—won't you tell me really why you came? I recognise—forgive my saying so—that you're not illiterate. What induced you——"

She hung her head—then, swiftly, threw it back—great

courage in the way she faced the scorn she felt impending.

"Hector," she exclaimed, "don't you remember—Georgina Harris—in Toronto?"

He puckered his brows, struggling with his memory. Slowly it all came back. He saw the girl standing with him, under the lamp—many years, many years ago.

Georgina Harris—the hideous truth confronted him. The girl had followed the path that might have been expected, then. This painted, wornout woman, mistress to a criminal, was Georgina Harris. Life suddenly seemed a terrible thing, youth dead with them both——

"I loved you once, Hector," she said wanly. "That's why I couldn't see you shot in cold blood—now. Don't condemn me, Hector. Please!"

He could not speak a word.

As soon as the woman had gone, under Blythe's escort, to join the mail, Hector thought the matter over.

To discover the assassin now was impossible. Two alternatives faced him if he was to save his life: One, to order the meeting cancelled; two, to stay away.

To cancel the meeting at this stage would be useless. The crowd would insist on holding it, defying the law. The fat would then be in the fire. To stay away would be a confession of weakness, after the declaration that he would attend. Moreover, Lancaster could not handle the crowd alone.

He must either betray his trust, let down the country when he was needed most, or—face practically certain death.

He had a very short time in which to make his decision—a decision that was so momentous.

Now he must be truly 'Spirit-of-Iron'! To face death in cold blood, not in battle, but at the hands of an unknown assassin—to sacrifice life on the gory altar of Duty—that was what he was required to do.

Blow on blow—trial on trial—racking him—scourging him——

The night was dark—very, very dark.

At seven o'clock the Rev. Mr. Northcote, strangely excited, came over to Hector, demanding his immediate attendance at the parson's quarters.

"I'm very busy," said Hector. "What is it?"

"A most urgent and important matter."

"This is very mysterious," Hector smiled. "Well, just for a minute, then. Go ahead. But not too fast. I'm tottery still."

They walked slowly over to Northcote's. The world was ominously still, frozen in deathly silence. From the town came the occasional howl of a husky and a murmur, as of a great crowd gathering. The night was pregnant with possibilities.

They entered the shack. Northcote pushed open the sitting-room door.

"In there," he whispered, smiling—gave Hector a gentle push—he went in.

The room was brightly lighted. By the stove stood a woman, in breeches, heavy stockings, moccasins and mackinaw coat—a woman with ruddy-gold hair—strangely familiar——

"Hector!" she said.

He heard his own voice, on a strained, unnatural note:

"Frances!"

Then everything went black before his eyes.

The shock passed, leaving behind an ecstasy. He felt that he was dreaming and would awake to a world of cold, deadly fact at any moment. He saw her hanging back, irresolute, as if she doubted his feelings after all these years. And, a second later, he knew himself holding her hands, tumbling out broken, incoherent words, leaving no time for her breathless, half-crying, half-laughing answers, and at last, taking her in his arms, kissing her desperately, saying over and over again:

"Frances! . . . Frances!"

While she answered, as he allowed her, with: "Hector! Oh, Hector! My dear, darling. . . . Hector——"

Then—everything else forgotten—except the marvellous, wonderful fact that she was with him—he began, turning her face to the light, holding her hands in a fevered clutch:

“But Frances. . . . Why are you here? When did you get here? Frances, I don’t understand. . . . This is too miraculous——”

“Didn’t you get my letter?”

“Your letter—when?”

“Hector, I wrote you not long ago, telling you I was on my way up here, and to write and tell me not to if you—if you’d forgotten. And, as you didn’t answer——”

“I never had it. Our mails are uncertain. Several have been lost—shipwreck and so on. Frances, this is a surprise. . . . I can’t speak. . . .”

“I was terribly afraid—before you came in—that you’d—you might have—forgotten, Hector. I didn’t know whether you’d think me mad—but I had faith in you. I’ve never forgotten what you said—that night at home—when you said you’d never—well, love anyone else—and I promised to be true to you. So I thought, ‘He’ll keep his word.’ Then, when I met Mr. Northcote—he’s such a dear—and found he knew you so well—I just told him, Hector. And he said he was sure—I needn’t be afraid——”

“Afraid?” She was in his arms again. “Afraid? Frances, if you only knew—how I’ve thought of you—how your face has always been before me—day and night—in these fifteen long, long years—what hell I went through when I lost you—and how hope left me long ago—so I just went on alone. I’m not the sort that loves more than once, Frances. I’ve loved you always—you don’t know what you’ve been to me—I’m no orator, Frances, but——”

“I can guess——” she whispered.

Presently, he asked her, overwhelmed once more with wonder:

“But Frances—how did you get here—where did you meet Northcote? Surely you didn’t come into this wild part of the world—alone?”

“Not exactly alone. I chummed up with some men on the boat—and your fellows—how magnificent they are, Hector!

—helped me along. I met Mr. Northcote by chance, at Lucky. The blizzard caught him there, like the rest of us—he'd come down on business, he said. He offered to escort me to Discovery. And that explains, doesn't it?"

"But then—you *really* came alone—all this way? Why?"

"Must I tell you?" she asked, eyes very misty.

"Frances—not——?"

"Because you were here? Yes, Hector."

"But—why, it's the pluckiest——"

"Love makes heroes of us all, Hector."

He kissed her again, passionately.

"Still I'm in the dark, Frances. Your long silence—where have you been? What have you been doing? I wrote when I got my Commission, you know—to the address you gave Mrs. Tweedy—you remember her? Well, it came back—a 'dead letter'—and after that it was useless, of course, to write again. Why didn't you get that letter?"

"We moved away from that address in a day or so. Then father started us off on a wild pilgrimage—everywhere, in the States, to cover our trail—afterwards to England—France——"

"I see. But why didn't you write—you had my address—a word—a line?"

"Don't reproach me, Hector. Father had me spied on shamelessly. I couldn't get a letter out of the house—or write one. It was terrible. But I stood it, for mother's sake."

"But surely—in fifteen years?"

"Wait. When we got to France, father made a marriage of convenience for me—a wealthy young Frenchman—Deschamps——"

"Then—why are you here?"

She saw the light dying in his eyes.

"Goose," she laughed. "Let me finish. I had to marry him. Oh, Hector, I can't tell you the agony, the shame, I went through—the fight I made. But it was no good. I married him at last—because I had to, Hector. I gave you up then, forever—because I had to. Jules was terribly jealous—he really did love me, Hector. When once his wife,

I had to play the game, even though it—broke my heart. You *must* understand, Hector.”

“I do,” he answered.

“But—afterwards—I couldn’t put you out of my mind. God knows, I tried. I couldn’t love Jules. We drifted apart. But I played the game. All the same, I couldn’t forget you. I followed your career, Hector, as well as I could. You don’t know how proud and happy I was to see you climbing up—up—up—all the time.” She smiled delightfully. “I watched for—a wife, Hector. But none appeared. Can you guess my thoughts, then? I can’t express them. They’re a secret between God and me. But I was happier than ever.”

“Frances!” he said.

“A year ago, Jules died. As soon as his affairs were settled, I travelled extensively. I was restless—didn’t know what to do. Father and mother are both dead, so I couldn’t go back to them. Gradually it came to me, Hector, that I should seek you out—wherever you were. I felt sure of you still, Hector, dear, you see—and perhaps you needed me. But what’s the use of saying more? I returned to Canada. It was easy to find out where you were. Then I wrote—and followed the letter. That’s all.”

“Frances! After all these years——”

So, for a moment, they gave themselves up to their great happiness. It seemed to Hector that all his dreary, toilsome life was compensated for, then and there; that once again he was back in Paradise.

“We can still begin, Frances,” he told her. “It’s not too late. But if only you’d come before. . . . Frances, I’m in the forties—think of it—with you, it doesn’t matter—” He took her face in his hands and looked at her with a tenderness that pierced her heart. “Frances, dear, you’re just the same! You’ve hardly changed a bit—and I—I!——”

“Hector, don’t talk like that.” Tears blinded her. “You’ve been ill—my poor boy! Mr. Northcote didn’t know, till we got here this afternoon, or we’d have hurried even more. Hector—Hector——”

For the first time she realised to the full his ghastly

thinness, the age in his hair, and contrasted it, agonizingly, with the proud strength and youth she had known long ago.

"Don't cry, little girl," he soothed her. "I'm all right. It's not too late. I——"

Then he remembered——

Remembered the situation in Black Elk—that in a few minutes he must join issue single-handed with a hostile crowd—and, worse than that, face certain death.

Slowly, the awful cruelty of the position sank into his breast; that, just when, after fifteen dreary years, Frances had been given back to him, he was required by circumstances to give her up again.

The iron hand of Duty had him in its grip, was crushing him—robbing him of everything.

Why had Frances been given to him, at this, of all times, when he must give her up so soon? Better if she had not come at all. It was not fair—it was hideous—that he should be faced with such a choice as this——

The choice between his duty and his great love.

Yet that choice he had to make. To the meeting he must go—after a little half-hour of ecstasy—half an hour in fifteen years!—he must say 'Goodbye.'

The Human Parson's words came back to him now, in all their awful truth:

'Everything worth while is won by sacrifice.' 'There comes a time, at least once in every man's life, when he must make one big concrete sacrifice.'

This was the time for him. It had him now!

She read the agony in his face.

"Hector," she begged, terrified. "What is it? What is it?"

He told her—not of the assassin—what was the use?—but of what was before him. And she guessed the rest.

"Is there danger?" she said. Then, "Oh, I know there's danger! Hector, Hector—don't go—my dear—it's too much—after all these years of loneliness—I don't want——"

He took her hands, holding them strongly.

"Frances," he told her, "this is—terrible—to me. Don't make it any harder than it already is."

She clung to him. He took her in his arms. So these two held to each other, the wreckage of their hopes around them, in their great agony. . . .

Northcote knocked softly at the door.

"Major," they heard his voice, "it's time to go."

"Frances—" said Hector.

She made a tremendous effort—triumphed—smiled bravely into his face——

"Go then, dear," she whispered. "God bless you."

This was a woman of the type which makes the old poet's words so very true:

"Sweet and seemly is it to die for one's country."

IV

Throughout the afternoon, Welland had been in joyful mood.

His plans were completed and about to bring forth fruit.

Wandering through crowded Discovery, he sensed the temper of the people and felt that he could not fail.

The revolution which the politician had induced Greasy Jones to foster had, for Welland, two purposes: first, the ruin of Superintendent Adair; second, his own political advancement.

On coming to Black Elk, Welland had aimed to secure a share of its riches and to look for an opportunity of smashing the Superintendent. His effort to break Hector openly having failed—as witness the Whitewash Bill affair—he had recognized that the only method likely to succeed was one of secrecy. A short stay in Prospect, a few weeks in Discovery, had shown him that he had admirable material at hand. Hundreds of desperate men, requiring only judicious bribery or subtle encouragement, were there to do his bidding. Meanwhile, he had acquired his share of Black Elk riches by purchase and partnership.

In time he realised that the civil administration was not incorruptible, though Lancaster, at its head, was above suspicion. He had already discovered much discontent. The idea struck him: Why not secure the services of a desperado

—Greasy Jones was the lucky man—to foster this discontent and bring about revolution? A few hundred men, if the plan were kept secret, could overthrow the Government. Adair would be held responsible, as having failed to detect the plot or crush the rising. The result would be his ruin. But, when the wheels were started, Welland realised that, without a just grievance, the movement would be supported only by the discontented minority. Then he remembered the weaknesses of the administration; offered it bribes, through other men; found that it could be tempted; and at once undermined the public confidence in its honesty by systematically corrupting it. This enabled him to enrich himself and to stir the people to a sense of wrong.

In a short time nearly everyone in the Territory was clamouring for a change, or at least a general clean-up. They were ripe for revolution.

And Welland wanted revolution; and wanted Greasy Jones and his crowd to dominate. For revolution would mean Hector's ruin. In that respect, he had been honest with the gangster. But he was far too wise to imagine that the Dominion would permit the Territory to remain under the revolutionary flag. He knew perfectly well that the Government, in the end, would crush the revolt and re-establish the Queen's authority. Therefore, it behooved him to look to the future. And, in looking to the future, he saw his chance to climb out of the wreckage of the revolution to higher things.

Frankly, he intended to do nothing, either for or against the revolution, after the Queen's authority was overthrown. He intended to remain quiet until the troops from Canada arrived. Then his scheme was to help the Government to 'tidy up' in every way. He would tell them that he had foreseen the trouble all along, had written home hinting of its coming—as he actually had—but had felt confident of Lancaster's ability to hold his place. He would tell a long tale of how Greasy Jones, after the revolution, had held him captive. He would make his special knowledge of the Territory invaluable. And, with one thing or another, he would finally appear in the eyes of the Government and of Canada

generally as the one capable man in Black Elk, a statesman and a hero. The result would be at least a place in the Cabinet. He might even rival the Prime Minister.

The only man from whom he had anything to fear was Greasy, who alone knew his part in fostering the revolution. Greasy would certainly betray him to the re-established authority—if he waited for it, which Welland was certain he would not. But no one would believe Greasy. His assertions would be thought preposterous. How could his word—or that of any of his confrères—count against that of Mr. Steven Molyneux, M. P.?

Thus would the revolution achieve Welland's two aims: Hector's ruin; and his own climb to great power.

For the first alone, he would never have run such risks; but for both, he had done so. And all was well.

Hector's death, at the hands of an unknown assassin, had come to him in the later stages, as an inspiration. The Superintendent's illness had shown Welland how anxious he really was to see his enemy dead. But, at the same time, he wished him to taste humiliation before he died. His recovery gave Welland a chance to achieve that wish. To find himself shot, at the very moment when the country needed him most, to die with the triumphant shouts of the revolutionists in his ears, shouts telling his degradation—what could be more terrible to Hector? Welland's plan allowed for this.

The politician was very, very happy. He saw the enemy of a lifetime dead at his feet, the revolution a success and the name of Superintendent Adair smirched and blotted, as representing one who had slept at his post and betrayed the people. And then he saw the revolution crushed and himself risen to heights as yet untouched.

At ten to eight he walked over to join the Lieutenant-Governor, so that he might sit on the platform and witness Hector's downfall.

Altogether, with his treachery to the Black Elk authorities and his treachery to Greasy Jones, Welland was not unqualified for the stigma, 'traitor.'

In the main square of Discovery City a vast crowd, representing most of the inhabitants of Black Elk, was assembled—a wild, undisciplined crowd, a heaping shovelful from the rubbish-heap of the whole wide world. For days it had been gathering together, its outward purpose to force Lancaster's resignation, the real purpose of its leaders to launch revolution. They did not contemplate bloodshed. But they were ready for it.

From a platform at one end of the square the Lieutenant-Governor and the officer commanding the Mounted Police—the one man they really feared—were to speak. Torches and lanterns around it threw it into a fierce light and illuminated the Union Jack which flapped idly from a pole above. The light fell also on the faces of the nearest men and was at last lost in the great heart of the crowd. Overhead the aurora surged and quivered, advanced and retired, staging marvellous pageantry in the intense darkness and seeming to rustle and to whisper. There was an awful atmosphere in the scene, as though something tremendous were about to happen.

It was eight o'clock.

A thunderous roar burst suddenly from the crowd, burst and rolled back and forth, like the roar of a fitful wind over the sea. Acclamation, surprise, above all, hostility, were in that strange cry.

The Lieutenant-Governor's party had appeared on the platform.

Lancaster brought no escort with him. None of the Mounted Police fringed the outskirts of the crowd. But with Lancaster was Major Adair.

Welland seated himself at the edge of the platform. He had no wish to be near Adair when the assassin fired his shot.

The crowd grew impatient, shouting and whistling, jeer-ingly for the Lieutenant-Governor. Suddenly a man arose, walked forward and held up his hand for silence.

A hush full of surprise—surprise affecting none more than

Welland—fell on the crowd. The man was not Lancaster. It was Spirit-of-Iron.

This was an unanticipated change in the programme. In a corner below the platform Nita Oswald, seeking the 'scoop' of her life, made her pencil fly over her notebook.

To the crowd, this man seemed to have arisen from the grave. They knew how close to death he had recently been. And his face was ghastly, while his clothes hung on him. It was evident that he was making a tremendous effort in attending the meeting at all. Grudging admiration seized them. They loved courage. Moreover, the man's personality was already gripping them, making them his.

To Hector, this was the supreme moment of his life, to which he had looked forward for months. He felt that everything depended on him in this crisis. If ever he had swayed men, cowed men, he must sway and cow them now, though he drooped with fatigue.

He had not forgotten the assassin. That unknown devil lurked always at the back of his mind. But he had passed the stage when he really cared whether the shot was fired or not, so long as he could master this immense mob—so immense that it seemed illimitable. Fortunately, he did not feel as if he faced this immensity, this monster stretching away and away into the darkness, alone. He felt—a wonderful feeling—that the strength of all Canada, for whom he was enduring this thing, was behind him, helping him to dominate, trusting him, looking to him—and behind Canada, the Empire——

So in the silence, he began. He had a strange sensation that someone else, far mightier than he, was speaking.

"Men, you are here tonight, believing yourselves victims of a corrupt administration, to present a petition to the Lieutenant-Governor, which, among other things, calls for a general clean-up, for Mr. Lancaster's resignation and for a transference of the power held by the Dominion Government to yourselves. This is the programme. I want to tell you that most of you have been deceived."

Welland felt a sudden chill. The crowd stirred, muttering,

with an occasional shout of angry dissent—stirred and was still again.

“Now, it is not my purpose tonight to dispute the arguments of those among you who are sincere. I will show you in a moment, however, that even your petition will prove unnecessary. What I do want to remind you of is that my duty here is to maintain the authority of the Dominion Government. And I am going to do it!”

The crowd waited sullenly. The determined ring in that last sentence stirred them.

“Many of you are foreigners, born under tyrannous governments, hating all constituted authority. The Canadian Government is a government of the people. It is not tyrannous. The Government of the British Empire, as a whole, is the same. Yet, when you come under the British Flag, instead of appreciating all this, you will listen to anyone who asks you to tear it down. Such an act is an act against yourselves—not against a tyrant, as you believe. The people, of whom the Queen is Sovereign, put me here to keep that Flag flying. And I’m going to keep it there!”

Jeers swept up to him. But the great mass of the crowd still waited.

“This isn’t a defiance. I’m merely warning you not to do anything you regret. I want you to act like sensible men.

“Now, let me tell you the truth. A big element among you is out, not for constitutional change, but revolution!”

A weird sigh, a long-drawn intaking of breath, ran over the great throng, expressive of stunned surprise and a sense of being trapped. As for Welland, his feelings beggar description. Hector was speaking very rapidly now, driving home his facts, beating down all opposition.

“It’s the truth. I have all the proofs. That element is out for revolution—possibly bloody revolution. They want to establish a republic—the Black Elk Republic!”

The bomb was thrown—with extraordinary effect.

“Listen! You’ve been absolutely fooled! Your leaders have led you into a trap. There’s an inner ring in this conspiracy. As soon as the revolution had taken place and the present authorities were overthrown, that ring—a ring of the

worst desperadoes on earth, many the sweepings of Prospect—was to establish a dictatorship. Those of you who don't know this would have known it very soon. Those who do, even these leaders themselves, would have found themselves one day with heads in a noose. You want the proofs? You don't. You know it's true."

Welland had grown cold.

"Those of you in the know thought I was asleep. A certain individual who ran the whole thing"—Welland half arose, a mad impulse to run away upon him; but Hector did not betray him—"he thought so, too. What are the facts? I have secret agents everywhere, known only to myself. One of them, in Prospect, brought me the first inkling of the plot. Unfortunately, he was shot before he could get more information. But others worked for me. What they couldn't discover, I guessed. I knew that gangsters were smuggling themselves through the pass; and that arms were being smuggled in, too. In fact, I let many of them through, so that those at the bottom of the plot wouldn't smell a rat. You've been told, by special speakers, a pack of lies. Mr. Lancaster and I, over a month ago, took steps to show you that they *were* lies. We knew that the telegraph lines were being tapped, but we kept on sending ordinary messages through, so that your leaders wouldn't know that. We knew that even the mails weren't safe. So we sent a special runner to our office in Prospect, with two messages to be forwarded and he brought the answers back. The first message was to the Dominion Government, the second to the Government of the United States, through the Dominion Government. They dealt with the situation and they secured answers which show how you've been duped. In this one, the Dominion Government pledges itself to a clean-up, through Mr. Lancaster, and to grant you wider powers than you have had hitherto. In that one, the American Government assures us that, contrary to what you've been told, it will on no account support any attempt to wrest Black Elk from Canada!"

There was absolute silence. Hector held the letters up.

"Look at them. If you think they're forgeries, let your

representatives examine them! But wait—there is something else in this letter from Ottawa. The Government is sending ten thousand troops up here to crush any revolt. We asked for them. They're on their way. That's what you've been led into!

"And the situation—now? I've stripped all my posts and detachments. Nearly all my officers and men arrived here secretly last night. They are now standing to arms with four machine-guns, at the barracks. There are also there a thousand loyal citizens of this Territory, all armed and under my orders. Half an hour ago, raids were made on the places where the would-be leaders of the revolt—Greasy Jones and his cut-throats—were hiding. Greasy Jones was shot dead by Inspector Cranbrook, after the gangster had wounded him. The rest are behind the bars. We also captured documents, stamps, flags and so on, giving conclusive evidence of what was coming. And we know that many of you are armed.

"That's all I have to say. This thing can't succeed. The Americans will *not* support it. Troops are on the way to back us up. The men who planned it are in our hands. Your grievances have been adjusted. We are fully armed and prepared to stand by the Flag to the last. What I say goes. Now, boys, take my advice and go home."

There he ended.

The effect of this dramatic and totally unexpected exposure of the whole plot and of Adair's preparations was indescribable. Even Lancaster was speechless—Hector had confided in him only what was absolutely necessary. Weland, unable to grasp the situation, was stunned. As for the crowd, it was paralysed. Hector had impressed them from the first. His final disclosures completed their stupefaction. Suddenly they saw the revolution with the bottom knocked out and remembered that this man was called 'Spirit-of-Iron.'

Hector sensed the change immediately and knew that he had triumphed. All his past life, his early training, his development, had been leading up to this crisis—this crisis which involved not only himself and his own welfare, as other crises had done, but also a great national issue, the

defeat, not only of his own enemy, but the enemy of his country. In a moment he saw that Destiny had given him victory in this last grim battle. His part was done.

But the assassin had not yet played *his* part. He had been instructed to fire as soon as the Superintendent ceased speaking. To him the change in the state of affairs involved no change. Through the strange silence came the crash of a rifle fired from somewhere on the outskirts of the great crowd—fired while Hector was still at the edge of the platform. Then Nita Oswald's voice, shrieking, clear and high:

"They've killed him! They've killed him!"

VI

Nugget City,
B. E. T.,
Today's Date.

To The Officer Commanding,
N. W. M. P.
Black Elk Territory.

Sir :

I have the honour to enclose a report just received from Sergeant Kellett, in charge of the post on Hopeful Pass.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

J. G. Gemmell, Inspector, N. W. M. P.

Enclosure.

Hopeful Pass Detachment,
B. E. T.,
Today's Date.

Officer Commanding,
N. W. M. P.
Nugget City,
B. E. T.

Sir :

With reference to the attempt to establish a revolutionary Government in this Territory, I have the honour to report as follows :

The nine-day blizzard following the night of the meeting at Discovery City tied up all traffic through this pass. Nevertheless, patrols were constantly maintained. Three snow-bound men were rescued, one man destitute taken in and one man, found snowed up, with dogs dead, was brought into the post dying from exhaustion and exposure.

On being revived, the latter individual made a confession bearing on the shooting at Discovery, copy of which is enclosed. However unreliable it may seem, this man was apparently of sound mind when he made this confession.

He stated that for the past eight months he had been employed on secret service work for the Officer Commanding this Territory, whose agents are known only to himself. In the course of his duties, he discovered that Mr. Steven Molyneux, M. P., was hand-in-glove with the gangster, the late Greasy Jones, planning the overthrow of the Government. In Prospect, he gained Jones' confidence and entered Black Elk Territory at about the same time. At noon on the day of the meeting, Greasy Jones informed him that he wished him to assume a post covering the platform and shoot Superintendent Adair. From previous information, he had already deducted that Mr. Molyneux's motive in plotting revolution was to harm Superintendent Adair; and certain statements made by Jones at this time convinced him that Mr. Molyneux had suggested the assassination to Jones. He agreed to do the shooting, but, knowing that Mr. Molyneux would be on the platform, resolved to shoot Mr. Molyneux instead. He therefore occupied a window commanding the platform, having dogs and sled ready for flight, and fired the shot at the time arranged, but at Mr. Molyneux instead of Superintendent Adair, with, as you know, deadly effect. In the confusion, he escaped, his intention being to get through the pass to Prospect and so away.

He stated that his motive in killing Mr. Molyneux was to repay Superintendent Adair, who had given him a chance years ago, when everyone was against him. He considered that a man who would plot such an underhand blow as Molyneux's was not fit to live anyway, and thanked God that he had killed him.

The man expired a short time after making his confession. He gave the name of Augustus J. Perkins.

I would repeat that, incredible as his accusation against Mr. Molyneux may seem, he was of apparently sound mind when he made it.

The corpse is in a temporary morgue, awaiting burial in the spring.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

R. S. Kellett, Sergeant, N. W. M. P.

Hector was at work on his account of the attempted revolution, for despatch to the Commissioner. For the last time, before enclosing it, he read Sergeant Kellett's report, carefully and deliberately. Then he thought deeply over Welland's part in the affair and especially of the last words of his enemy, gasped into Hector's ear as he lay dying on the platform, shot through the lungs:

"Adair—if you remember who I really am—for God's sake don't betray me!"

Here, in writing his report, he had a glorious opportunity of paying the dead man back in his own coin—of telling the world that Steven Molyneux was really Joseph Welland, ex-criminal; and that the man to whom the people had entrusted great power had misused it in an attempt to bring about revolution within the Dominion. No good purpose would be served—but revenge is sweet. In his hands alone rested the dead man's honour. He alone possessed the facts.

He turned back to the report—to the paragraph which the Prime Minister himself was to read in Parliament a few months later, in moving a vote of thanks to Superintendent Adair:

'Referring to the attached report from Sergeant Kellett, although the man Perkins actually had acted as one of my agents, there is no evidence to support the statement that he did the shooting, nor to show that the late Mr. Molyneux was concerned in the revolutionary plot. I think this should be sufficient to clear Mr. Molyneux's reputation. Despite

Sergeant Kellett's view, I am of the opinion that Perkins was not of sound mind when he made his statement.'

So might Molyneux's reputation be preserved, at no expense to Perkins.

A few words more completed the report. The door opened softly. Frances came in.

"Dare I intrude——" she whispered, "now"?

He was up in a moment, with much of his old vigour and a swiftness that showed him rapidly recovering from his illness of a fortnight before.

"Yes," he answered her, smiling. "Duty first,—but I've finished at last. What is it?"

"I thought I'd come and tell you something, Hector—a splendid surprise. Dr. Quick told it me in confidence and really, though it's a shame to give it away, I'm so proud that I just can't keep it to myself any longer."

"Oh?" He was holding her hands now, towering over her and smiling down quietly upon her with his steel-grey eyes. "What is the surprise?"

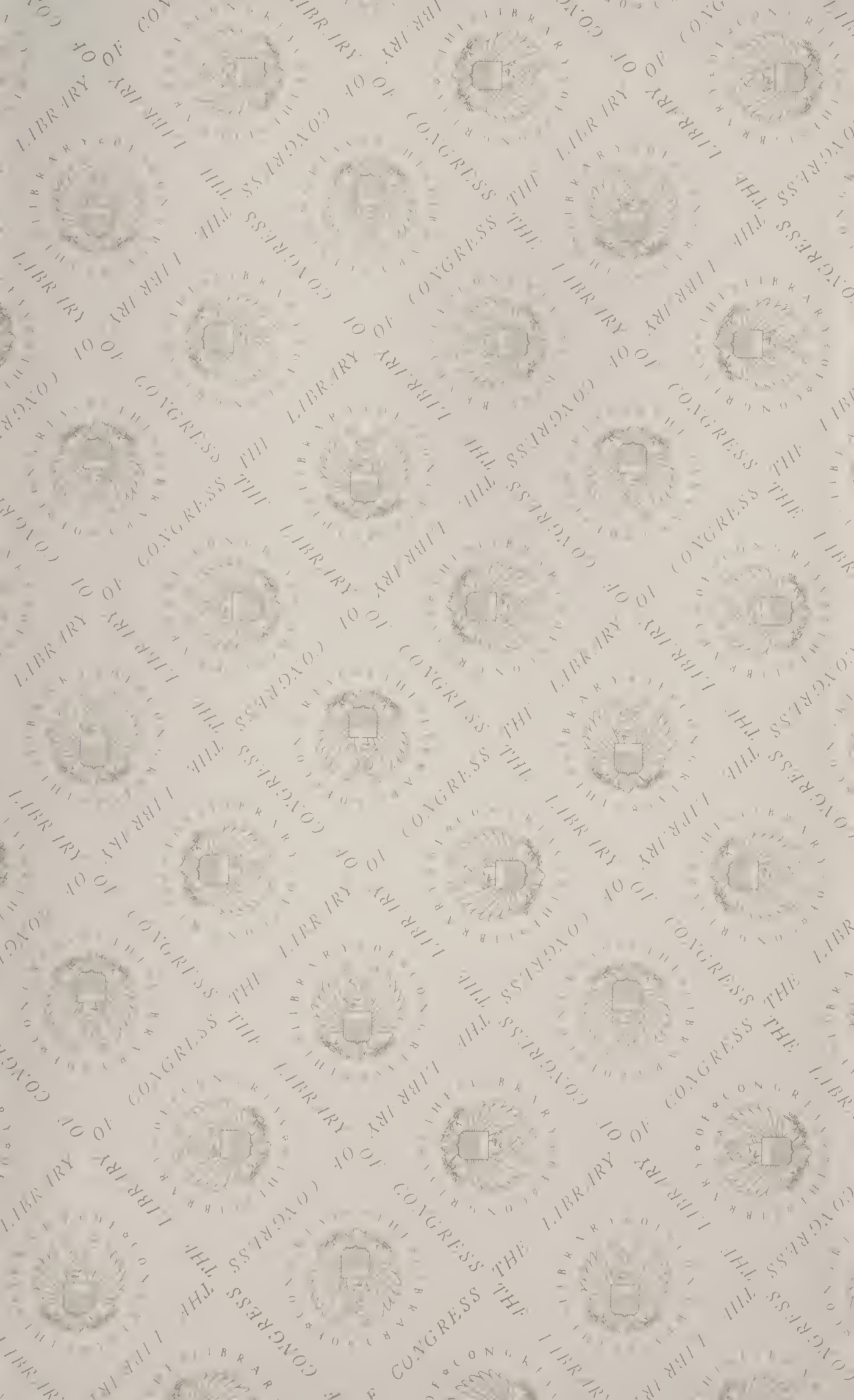
"Hector, dear—when Mr. Northcote's tied the knot—tomorrow—there's going to be a huge reception. Everyone will be there—almost all the would-be revolutionists—blind fools, they understand you now—Oh, and lots of others! And they're to present you with an address and a wonderful gift—there'll be thousands of them.—Hector! Isn't it glorious?"

"I don't want their presents, Frances—when I have you. I just did—what it was my duty to do. It's *you* I want!"

He lifted her lips to his. She ran a hand tenderly over the grey hair.

"Your duty—that's all!—'You only want me!' Hector, that's *so* like you," she whispered. "That is you—*my* splendid Spirit-of-Iron!"





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